



Athens

The City as University

Niall Livingstone

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The citizens of ancient Athens were directly responsible for the development and power of its democracy; but how did they learn about politics and what their roles were within it? In this volume, Livingstone argues that learning about political *praxis* (how to be a citizen) was an integral part of the everyday life of ancient Athenians. In the streets, shops and other meeting-places of the city, people from all levels of society, from slaves to the very wealthy, exchanged knowledge and competed for power and status. *Athens: The City as University* explores the spaces and occasions where Athenians practised the arts of citizenship for which they and their city became famous.

In the agora and on the *pnux*, Athenian democracy was about performance and oratory, but the written word opened the way to ever-increasing sophistication in both the practice and theory of politics. As the arts of spin proliferated, spontaneous live debate in which the speaker's authority came from being one of the many remained a core democratic value. Livingstone explores how ideas of democratic leadership evolved from the poetry of the legendary law-giver Solon to the writings of the sophist Alcidamas of Elaia. The volume offers a new approach to the study of ancient education and will be an invaluable tool to students of ancient politics and culture, and to all those studying the history of democracy.

Niall Livingstone is a Senior Lecturer in Classics, Ancient History, and Archaeology at the University of Birmingham.

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2017
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Livingstone, Niall.

Title: Athens: the city as university / Niall Livingstone.

Description: Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon : Routledge, 2016. Series: Routledge monographs in classical studies | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015044494 | ISBN 9780415212960 (hardback : alkaline paper) | ISBN 9781315646084 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Athens (Greece)—Intellectual life. | Education, Higher—Greece—Athens—History—To 1500. | Learning and scholarship—Greece—Athens—History—To 1500. | Greek literature—History and criticism. | Citizenship—Greece—Athens—History—To 1500. | Democracy—Greece—Athens—History—To 1500. | Political culture—Greece—Athens—History—To 1500. | Athens (Greece)—Politics and government. | Athens (Greece)—Social life and customs. | Greece—History—To 146 B.C.

Classification: LCC DF275.L58 2016 | DDC 938/.5—dc23

LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015044494>

ISBN: 978-0-415-21296-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-64608-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Swales & Willis Ltd, Exeter, Devon, UK

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About this book

The City as University asks how citizens learned to play their roles in the democratic government of the ancient city of Athens. It shows that the answer to this question is not to be found in any systematic course of learning to which citizens had varying levels of access, or in 'education' understood as something compartmentalised, a preparation for life ritually and institutionally set apart from life itself. Learning in Athens was pervasive and immersive. Athenian citizens were able to make participatory democracy work because learning political *praxis*, learning to act as citizens, was woven into the daily practice of citizen life itself.

Citizen involvement in government in ancient Athens was on an overwhelming scale. It was extraordinary in terms of the numbers of people participating in decision-making bodies such as the assembly, the council and the courts; the number of public bodies demanding such participation; the range and complexity of the social networks underpinning these institutions, and the degree of responsibility which often rested either on a single majority vote or on small numbers of democratically appointed, and democratically accountable, office holders.¹ Wealth remained a major factor in political influence, and rich and poor were not equally able to take up its opportunities, but the fact remains that democracy required and relied on the shared efforts of a very large number of people.² At one extreme, there was the brutal physical labour routinely exacted from slaves of both sexes. At the other, there was the exceptional leisured freedom of a small number of elite male citizens. In between these extremes, though, there was a long continuum, which is only beginning to be understood in all its complexity, consisting not only of the rest of the enfranchised citizen men but also of Athenian women, free non-Athenians both male and female, and those slaves whose work was such as to give them some limited measure of independence from their owners. Along this continuum were many who could have very little experience if any of 'formal' education, but whose learning and expertise was crucial to the democracy. This book seeks to contribute to our understanding of the context and spaces in which this know-how was acquired and exercised.

Chapter 1, 'Setting the stage for citizens', examines how the ideals of Athenian democracy, especially as embodied in the legendary

figure of Solon the lawgiver, provide a conceptual paradigm for citizen learning and political engagement. Chapter 2, 'Citizen spaces', makes particular use of an irregular and unruly form of evidence – the fragments of the highly characteristic comic drama of the democratic city – to explore some of the gaps and interstices between the official institutions of the democratic city and the official categories of modern scholarship to trace promiscuous and unregulated dissemination and reinterpretation of knowledge. Chapter 3, 'The citizen performer', focuses on Alcidamas of Elaia's *On Writers* – an important text often neglected by modern scholarship – to show how it provides both a populist critique of elite formal education and a practical demonstration of how citizen expertise can be realised in political practice.

The three chapters of the book are drawn together, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, by structural analysis of the performance world of Athenian democracy in terms of space and time, each viewed from two perspectives: space as an open space of potentiality (χώρα, *khōra*) which offers limitless creation and recreation of specific venues or *loci* of action (τόποι, *topoi*), and time as the extended and quantifiable expanse of time (χρόνος, *khronos*), capable of being institutionally managed and commodified and constituting the raw material of memory, punctuated and vitalised by time as the moment of intervention, opportunity and personal agency (καιρός, *kairos*).³

The 'democratic Athens' to which this book sometimes makes shorthand reference is an abstraction: the period roughly from the beginning of the fifth century to the late fourth century bc in which Athens was (with brief interruptions) under democratic government spanned many generations and was marked by profound changes, social, economic and political; Athens in the 380s would not have felt very familiar to someone who had known the city in the 480s, or vice versa, and literary sources testify to long-lived Athenians' strong sense of a world transformed in their own time. It is a useful abstraction because the uneven chronological distribution and fragmentary nature of the surviving evidence makes a high-resolution focus on individual years or even decades impractical, and also because there are significant cultural continuities as well as breaks; phenomena which belong distinctively to a particular period are identified as such.

There is no entirely satisfactory system for writing ancient Greek names in English. I have used Latinised or Anglicised versions of Greek names when these are current and familiar; for more obscure names I have used transliterated Greek. In borderline cases, I have

made decisions which are necessarily arbitrary, writing for instance Peisistratos (not Pisistratus) and Kleisthenes (not Cl(e)isthenes); I have not striven for complete consistency, and have for instance chosen Alcidas (not Alkidamas) because I personally find the ‘soft c’ pronunciation more readable. I have tried as far as possible not to interrupt English sentences (except translations from Greek) with too many transliterated Greek terms. I therefore often use ‘city’ to mean *polis*, hoping that this will not obscure the differences (in classical Greece a *polis* is defined more by political autonomy than by, say, the size of the settlement or of its population). Similarly I use ‘democracy’ both for ancient Greek forms of ‘popular’ government (such as that in Athens) and for modern systems which go by that name, without wishing to obscure the diversity within both groups, the fundamental differences between the two groups, or the fact that ancient democracies would not count as democratic by modern standards – and vice versa.

Translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

Notes

- 1 See especially Ober 2008, Ismard 2010.
- 2 See, for example, Robertson 1990:61 on the measures required to keep restored democratic government ticking over in the dire economic circumstances following the city’s defeat in the Peloponnesian War.
- 3 On Athenian time, see especially Allen 1996; also Trédé 1992 on *kairos*, and on ancient time and ancient historiography more generally, Feeney 2007. On the ‘spatial turn’ in current educational theory, influenced in particular by the Bakhtinian concept of the ‘chronotope’, see, for example, Charlton et al. 2011.

Acknowledgements

I thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the University of Birmingham for research leave which made it possible for me to work on this book. My exceptional Classics teacher Mr Keith Prowse introduced me many years ago to the questions this book asks and inspired me to try and answer them, and I have been grateful to him ever since. My colleagues at the University of Birmingham, especially Professor Leslie Brubaker, Dr Elena Theodorakopoulos and Dr Will Mack, have been exceptionally generous with their support and advice, and I thank them as well as the many postgraduate and undergraduate students whose ideas have helped to refresh mine and to restore my spirits. Successive editors at Routledge have been heroic in their patience and forbearance; thanks especially to Lizzi Thomasson whose friendly persistence and unfailing support has finally brought it to press. Above all, I am grateful to Liz Clements, who has lived with the book, read large chunks of it and given much good advice, and kept me and it alive.

1 Setting the stage for citizens

Introduction: Democratic knowledge

This book asks how the world's first great democracy worked in practice.¹ How did the citizens of ancient Athens come to have the know-how to run their city?² Friends and enemies of democracy in ancient Greece agreed on at least one thing: that this was a bold and radical form of government. Centuries of precedent could be invoked to demonstrate that fitness to govern was a rare quality to be found only among the 'best' in society, and that rule by many was undesirable: 'command by many is not good; let one man be commander, one man the king', in the words of Homer's Odysseus (*Iliad* 2.204–5).³ A city in which *every* citizen could play a part in leadership surely had to be quite exceptional. Not surprisingly, the Athenians, citizens of the ancient democracy best known to us, were more than happy to assert that they were indeed exceptional, as for example in the manifesto for democracy which Thucydides, writing in the late fifth century, has the Athenian statesman Pericles deliver over those killed in the first year of the Peloponnesian War, 431/0 bc.⁴ Other democratic cities were doubtless equally bullish.⁵ Athenians could look for validation to Athene's patronage and their mythic image of themselves as 'autochthonous', descended from ancestors born from the very ground on which they lived (by contrast with other cities founded by wandering kings or tribes of the heroic age).⁶ But how well were Athenian citizens actually equipped to participate in the government of their city, and how – if not through divine favour – did they become so equipped?

One of the most memorable statements of the foundational ideals of Athenian democracy is to be found in Euripides' tragedy *Suppliants*, first performed around 423 bc, where it is articulated by Theseus: Athens' great Panhellenic hero and, by a light paradox familiar in drama, king of the democratic city of Athens within the mythic scenario of the play. In *Suppliants*, an aggressive messenger, herald of king Kreon, arrives in Athens from the autocratic city of Thebes. Theseus explains that, in spite of his own status as king, Athens is ruled by the people. The Theban replies contemptuously:

Well, there you've put us one piece up already,
like in a game

Of draughts. How could the demos, unable to
order speech (*logoi*)

in correct order, be able to guide the city
straight?

It's time, not speed, that makes for better

learning. And one who works the land and has
no wealth –

even supposing him not to be ignorant – because
of work

would not be able to attend to the public
interest.⁷

The herald elides two criticisms: (i) that governing requires control of speech/discourse (*logoi*), which requires learning, which requires time, which the poor worker does not have, and (ii) that governing – engagement with public affairs – itself requires time, which the poor worker does not have. Theseus does not answer either point explicitly. Instead, he emphasises how in Athens everyone has the opportunity to contribute if they have something useful to say (438–41) – the essence, he suggests, of freedom and equality⁸ – before focusing on the evils of tyranny. The question of how someone comes to be *able* to contribute in the first place is left hanging.⁹

Plato, his perspective in the fourth century coloured by Athens' defeat by Sparta and Socrates' condemnation by a people's court, had a simple answer to this question of competence: the Athenians did *not* know how to run their city, which was why democracy failed; this was not just a contingent practical failure, but the result of a conceptual error which would bedevil any attempt at democracy.¹⁰ Plato's influence was such that his answer has, directly or indirectly, had a determining effect on all subsequent thinking about Athenian democracy. For centuries, classical Athens was viewed through a dividing prism: on the one hand, the timeless achievements of an enlightened elite, integral to the glory of Greece; on the other, the destructive folly of the unchecked masses: Greek *dēmokratia* – 'people power' – redefined from the viewpoint of its contemporary detractors as *ochlokratia* – 'mob power'.

Plato's view is to a large extent reflected in the work of the two great twentieth-century historians of Greek education, Werner Jaeger and Henri-Irénée Marrou. Jaeger's *Paideia*, a magisterial work whose publication history in three volumes and two languages spans the years 1933–47, and whose switch from German to English mirrors its author's career, is part paean to, part elegy for the noble traditions and destiny of liberal humanism.¹¹ Marrou's *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité* is a very different work, a meticulous account of the *longue durée* of Greco-Roman educational practice from the heroic age to Late Antiquity.¹² What both have in common is a vision of the intellectual and creative elite of classical Athens as torch-bearers, or perhaps as the knots in a kind of precarious rope-bridge, connecting archaic aristocracy with Hellenistic kingship and thus with the Roman Empire and its Christian inheritors – across the anarchic populist gulf of the fifth and fourth centuries bc. In this imagined world, the best Athenians looked back in time, like Aeschylus, dramatist of doomed heroic warriors; or forwards, like Isocrates, prophet of Alexander the Great's empire; or out to Sparta and Persia, like the adventurer Xenophon; or up to heaven, like the pious tragedian Sophocles, or up beyond heaven, like the philosopher Plato – but *around them*, only of necessity, to lament their fellow-citizens' folly. For both Jaeger and Marrou, what mattered about ancient education was its continuity, from deep ancient roots in Homeric epic through to Christian Late Antiquity and beyond to the European Enlightenment – a continuity so long that a hundred and fifty years of democracy register in it barely as a flicker. This attention to gradual historical development, to the *longue durée*, was a corrective to undue focus on times and places in antiquity cherry-picked by modern scholars as exemplars of the 'greatness' of the ancient world; a broader, more balanced and less sensational view could thus emerge.¹³ The corollary of this, however, is that the specificities of democratic Athens, and the rootedness of its educational culture in democracy itself, were of very little importance – and that such importance as democracy had for education was essentially negative.

Marrou's book, published in French in 1948 and in English translation in 1956, was a monumental achievement. Recent decades have brought ground-breaking studies of specific aspects of ancient education, especially Teresa Morgan's work on literate education in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and Rafaella Cribiore's on teaching in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt and on the institutional culture of the great rhetorician Libanius's school in Antioch in the fourth century ad.¹⁴ Yet Marrou's remains the standard general history of Greek and Roman education, in spite of the many advances in knowledge,

disciplinary shifts and changing fashions which the intervening decades have brought. Contributions to the volume *Pedagogy and Power* (Too and Livingstone 1998) pulled at some of the threads in Marrou's continuum of classical pedagogy. Too's edited volume *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (2001) laid some of the foundations for a new history (including important essays on archaic and classical Greece by Mark Griffiths and Andrew Ford). But Marrou's book is still unreplaced, and thus the gap left by its relative lack of interest in what was distinctive about Athenian democratic learning remains unfilled.

Citizens modern and ancient

Democratic societies depend on the support and engagement of their citizens. The citizens must therefore, if democracy is to succeed, be disposed to lend it that support by investing in it the scarce commodities of their time and labour. Just what it means to be a citizen in a democracy, however, is much less clear in modern countries which call themselves democratic than it was in the first democratic societies, such as ancient Athens. In the United Kingdom, citizens cast votes (if they do so at all) perhaps once a year, and their ability to determine or influence how they are governed is radically restricted by factors including place of residence, electoral and administrative boundaries, the vagaries of the party system and of party policy making, even before the severe limitations on the power of government itself are taken into account. In between elections, even politically engaged members of society may be inclined to revert to a 'them and us' mentality, bewailing the unsuccessful performance of our democratic system while acknowledging, with rage or resignation according to individual temperament, individual powerlessness to transform it.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, aspirations to democracy are more fiercely contested than ever, often under threat of death. The relationship between electors, governments and financial institutions is fraught. In affluent countries, governments struggle to conceal from the public the extent of their dependency on private and corporate wealth; in less affluent ones, democracy may be seen as a path to liberation or as a proxy for control by international financial institutions. Athens at the time of writing is once again a testing ground for democracy, its government treading a perilous line between the democratic authority of the Greek electorate and the power of regional and global capital.¹⁵ Further east and south around

the Mediterranean and beyond, popular movements against authoritarian or post-colonial regimes have fallen victim to violent terror. Meanwhile, in established democracies, disillusionment with political parties, marginalisation of organised labour, and fading memory of past campaigns to extend the franchise (and of associated social change) all contribute, together with economic crisis, to a sense of alienation from the political process. Citizenship taught as a subject in school tends to be dominated by discussion of rights and responsibilities; it can all too easily be seen by students at best as an extension of school rules, at worst as irrelevant, pious cant. The danger is that young people enter adult life without any strong sense of agency, autonomy, empowerment, or the possibility of real change.¹⁶

This is doubtless a particular problem in the UK, constitutionally in any case a polity not of citizens but of subjects of our queen or king: an arrangement which, for all its romantic and – when looking at heads of other states – occasional practical appeal, tends to lead to a diminished sense of individual responsibility, let alone control, in relation to affairs of state. In the US, by contrast, a plethora of inspiring documents, beginning spectacularly with the Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights and including many others, from Abraham Lincoln's speech at the National Cemetery in Gettysburg in 1863 to Dr Martin Luther King's speech in Washington at the Lincoln Memorial a century later, and beyond are more than enough to animate interest in citizenship in all but the most cynical or apathetic.¹⁷ In France, similarly, the legacy of the Enlightenment intellectuals, the *philosophes*, and the wider history of the Revolution and its aftermath provide a shared story both of democratic ideals and of the perils of despotism which has lasted through the travails of each successive French Republic, though questions about who exactly shares this heritage and how become ever more insistent. In the UK, in spite of the country's long history of radical political movements and of contributions to political philosophy both of the left and of the right, centuries of constitutional development have left a more ambiguous legacy. The settlement encoded in the Magna Carta is too obviously a deal between embattled king and embittered nobles; Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* belongs more evidently to his adopted country than to the country of his birth; Churchill's celebrated Second World War speeches are too obviously examples of brilliantly effective rhetorical whistling in a darkness which eventually lifted (for some at least) for reasons quite beyond his control. Although the US is better provided in this respect, the success of the Tea Party movement and its powerful influence on politicians of the right and centre-right

shows the extent of disillusionment, whether popular, media-orchestrated or both, with established mechanisms of collective decision making.

Human society depends on communal identity and collective action; models we are currently using seem inadequate to the challenges we face. We have two alternatives: to find new models of citizenship capable of creating cohesion – culturally, emotionally and economically – across divides of wealth, class, race and age; or to sink, slowly but surely, into a self-destructive post-capitalist inferno along the lines gruesomely envisaged in Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *The Year of the Flood* (2009), in which individual choices tend not to advance but to thwart individual goals, and the powers of corporate greed ultimately manage and technologise the human race, including their own masters and creators, out of existence. This book is motivated by the belief that new models can, once again, build on old ones, from the ancient Greek origins of democratic citizenship. The developed world of the twenty-first century is immeasurably different from Athens in the fifth century bc. Like the ancient Athenians, though, we are in the midst of a revolution in time, space and society: who we can talk to, when, how, and where. Our possibilities and dangers are not the same as theirs, but – I will argue – there is enough similarity to provide us with powerful models for future action.

In his radical reappraisal of the working of democracy in Athens entitled *Democracy and Knowledge* (2008), Josiah Ober has argued persuasively, using a wide range of social and economic indicators, that ancient Athens was an unusually successful city-state and that there is strong evidence of a correlation between Athens' success and the performance of her democratic systems of government. ('Systems', rather than 'system', both because there was of course much change over time and because there was never a time – in ancient Athens, or anywhere else – when 'democracy' was just one thing; it has, always and everywhere, consisted of interlocking patterns of social conventions, legal regulation and political activity.) Ober further argues that the explanation for this success lies in the effectiveness of the democracy in sharing valuable knowledge among a large proportion of the citizen body and thus maximising the amount of individual ability which could be harnessed at any given time to achieve goals useful to the community as a whole – in war, in the economy, and in preserving the political stability and cohesion of the city itself. Ober's approach is primarily from the perspective of the various systems which constituted the democracy, and how those systems were successful in harnessing individual effort. It needs as its complement a cultural account showing how individual Athenians

were brought to a position where their efforts could, in practice, be harnessed for democracy; how the individual democratic agents were formed on whom democratic institutions depended, and who, in turn, created and re-created those institutions. In this process, a vital role was played by the culture and ideology of citizenship, and above all of participation and performance as citizens. While much of the everyday dynamic of this culture is lost to us, we find its contours powerfully articulated in literary texts, some inherited from before the democracy or from the time of its nascence, others shaped by the institutions of the democratic city itself.

Democracies

Classical Athens depended on the unpaid labour of free women and on the forced and unpaid labour of slaves, both women and men. Neither group was recompensed with direct official involvement in communal decision making. Women had channels of influence, hard to define and quantify but more significant and numerous than accounts of the democratic city have often assumed, but no prospect of enfranchisement. Slaves had (in some cases) some prospect of enfranchisement, but either no channels of influence or influence which was very indirect and submerged.¹⁸ Athens is thus a ‘democracy’ in a specific historical sense reflecting its etymology *dēmou kratia*, *dēmokratia*, power in the hands of the *dēmos*: the ‘people’, but people in a sense which excludes slaves and gives men authority at the expense of women.¹⁹ This book emphatically is not, to answer a question I was once asked sarcastically by a colleague, a story about ‘merry Athens’. Athenian society was built on the oppression of one half of the population – women – and of a significant proportion of the remaining half – male slaves – and on their exclusion from political power; even for those fortunate enough to be born male into citizen families, it had all the grimness of a pre-modern community in which war was normal and even the economically privileged of both sexes faced high odds of an early and painful death, in childbearing or as casualties of battle. The elite male sources which essentially control our image of Athens in this period²⁰ show us a society which depended for its prosperity on the forced labour of chattel slaves, both male and female, both adults and children; in which female members even of free and wealthy families had severely limited self-determination, and were routinely subject to exploitation and abuse; and where immigrants and foreigners faced, even more so than in the modern world, severe limitations on their autonomy and opportunities. ²¹ These dark realities make all the more

fascinating the extent to which, within the parameters and limitations of a radically patriarchal, slave-owning, xenophobic, routinely war-torn and – from our modern perspective – technologically backward society, the Athenians developed strikingly successful paradigms of civic inclusion, collective decision making and social collaboration.²² Athenian democracy was obviously deficient, indeed abhorrent, by modern standards. It is all the more interesting to explore the ways in which within its severely restricted parameters Athenian democracy was, by standards which citizens of modern societies aspiring to freedom, self-determination and democracy might recognise or even embrace, indeed *more* democratic than any system of government in existence today.

My focus is on Athens at the time when democracy, however we or the Athenians define it, prevailed: in increasing measure during the fifth century bc, and for most of the fourth century bc (with interruptions in both cases). I am interested in the cultural and institutional formation of democratic citizens, and to understand the basis of this, we need to look back to the formative stages of historical Greek culture as it is known to us and to the texts and traditions out of which the culture of Athenian democracy developed and upon which citizens of Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries relied, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, for ideals, inspiration and intellectual models.

Intellectual attainment and democratic ideals

Resentment (φθόνος) towards those who excel, whether in virtue, intellect or prosperity, is a trademark of tyrants, an idea which is neatly encapsulated in a famous story told by Herodotus: Thrasyloulos, tyrant of Miletos, when asked for advice on rulership by his fellow tyrant Periander of Corinth, gives a simple dramatic representation of the principle by cutting down all the tallest ears of corn in a field.²³ Democracy is typically praised for its ability to provide all citizens with an equal opportunity to show their abilities and make their own contribution. Thus when Herodotus presents his famous (and famously implausible – even, Herodotus warns us, to his original audience) account of Persian nobles after a *coup d'état* debating what kind of constitution they should adopt, Otanes, the advocate of democracy, contrasts the resentful and selfish attitude of an autocrat with the shared, inclusive decision making characteristic

of a state ruled by the people.²⁴

Openness to the ideas of all, and determination to make use of everyone's abilities, are prominent features of the rhetoric of Athenian democracy in Thucydides' *History*, where this constitutional feature blends with the restless curiosity and inventiveness which are seen as being part of the Athenian character. The Corinthians, instructing their Spartan allies what kind of opponents they face, emphasise the unselfishness with which Athenians contribute ideas to the state.²⁵ Similarly the Thucydidean Pericles' praise of the Athenian character in his Funeral Speech has at its core the insistence that political participation is not merely encouraged but expected of every Athenian citizen:

φιλοκαλοῦμέν τε γὰρ μετ' εὐτελείας καὶ φιλοσοφοῦμεν ἄνευ μαλακίας· πλούτῳ τε ἔργου μᾶλλον καιρῷ ἢ λόγου κόμπῳ χρῶμεθα, καὶ τὸ πένεσθαι οὐχ ὁμολογεῖν τινὶ αἰσχρόν, ἀλλὰ μὴ διαφεύγειν ἔργῳ αἴσχιον. ἐνὶ τε τοῖς αὐτοῖς οἰκείων ἅμα καὶ πολιτικῶν ἐπιμέλεια, καὶ ἑτέροις πρὸς ἔργα τετραμμένοις τὰ πολιτικὰ μὴ ἐνδεῶς γινῶναι· μόνοι γὰρ τὸν τε μηδὲν τῶνδε μετέχοντα οὐκ ἀπράγμονα, ἀλλ' ἀχρεῖον νομίζομεν, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἦτοι κρίνομέν γε ἢ ἐνθυμούμεθα ὁρθῶς τὰ πράγματα, οὐ τοὺς λόγους τοῖς ἔργοις βλάβην ἡγούμενοι, ἀλλὰ μὴ προδιδαχθῆναι μᾶλλον λόγῳ πρότερον ἢ ἐπὶ ᾧ δεῖ ἔργῳ ἔλθεῖν... ξυνελών τε λέγω τήν τε πᾶσαν πόλιν τῆς Ἑλλάδος παιδευσιν εἶναι καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον δοκεῖν ἂν μοι τὸν αὐτὸν ἄνδρα παρ' ἡμῶν ἐπὶ πλεῖστ' ἂν εἶδη καὶ μετὰ χαρίτων μάλιστ' ἂν εὐτραπέλως τὸ σῶμα αὐταρκὲς παρέχεσθαι.

We pursue beauty but avoid extravagance; our intellectualism does not make us spineless. Our wealth serves us for practical requirements, not for boastful talk. It is no disgrace for anyone to admit to poverty; there is disgrace, rather, in taking no action to escape from it. (2) It is possible for the same people simultaneously to manage their own affairs and the city's, and if others are preoccupied with work, it does not hinder them from judging the city's interests. We are unique in regarding anyone who takes no part in politics not as a quiet citizen, but as a useless one, and we ourselves are sure judges, if not planners, of our policy.²⁶ We take the view that action is not marred by debate, but by the failure to obtain instruction through debate before proceeding to act as necessary . . . (41) In sum I say that our city is the education of Greece; and, on the individual level, I would say it is here that any one man has in his own person the means to pursue the greatest variety of ends, and to do so with the greatest versatility and grace.²⁷

The message of inclusivity and universal engagement matches the principle that anyone who so wishes, *ho boulomenos*, can contribute to democratic debate, proudly articulated in the scene from Euripides' *Suppliants* discussed above.

Athens, then, is a place where everyone can contribute and everyone is expected to do their best, where ability is valued and rewarded and new ideas are always welcome. On the other hand, the claim that debate does not hinder action does not, of course, go

unchallenged in Thucydides' history. It is challenged in particular in the speech he gives to the demagogue Kleon in Book 3, when Kleon urges the Athenian assembly to press ahead with savage reprisals against the rebellious citizens of Mytilene.²⁸ Kleon begins his speech with vigorous criticism of his audience for its love of debate itself, and especially of debate as an opportunity for cleverness.²⁹ Democratic decision making as characterised by Kleon is no longer a sharing of mental resources, but an addictive competitive game in which public interest gives way to self-interest, actions – in Thucydides' favourite antithesis – give way to words, and intellectual display becomes an end in itself. Cleverness turns politics into self-serving performance. The idea is epigrammatised in an intricate metaphorical expression which can be roughly translated 'you generally attend debates as spectators, but of actions you hear only the report.'³⁰

From the perspective of this speech, then, clever speakers put their own glory before the public interest, trivialise the decision-making process, and obstruct the adoption of practical and necessary measures. The opposing speaker in the Mytilene set-piece, Diodotos, deals effectively with Kleon's disparagement of debate in general and with his additional suggestion that motives of bribery may be involved; it is interesting, however, that he too invokes an ideal of 'plain speaking', and complains that because of the Athenians' super-subtlety even the best proposals must be cloaked in an element of falsehood lest they seem too good to be true and thus fall under suspicion of concealing a darker motive.

Another reason for disquiet about cleverness in the Assembly emerges only tangentially from the Mytilene debate. Both Kleon and Diodotos assume that excess cleverness is general to the Assembly; but Diodotos makes the point that 'we', who give advice, should be expected to take a longer view than 'you', who listen to it, and Kleon refers to the city enduring risks for which 'others' take the prizes: in other words, a distinction can be made between performers and spectators in the theatre of the Assembly, and the performers, who (in Kleon's perspective) indulge in displays of cleverness and put their own interests before the people's, may be a comparative few. This idea – that the leading 'contributors' at any one time may form a small and definite group (and will be socially advantaged by virtue of this position even if they were not socially advantaged before) – may be an obvious one enough from a practical point of view, but it is ideologically dangerous. Similarly in Theseus' speech in *Suppliants* discussed earlier, the speaker becomes *lampros*, 'famous', and the non-speaker 'stays quiet'; the speaker's glory may be fleeting, but it brings potentially lasting enhancement of social status. The challenge for

democracy is to produce political leaders who will shine when they take the stage, yet be willing to step off it as well as onto it; who will realise and command the power of political rhetoric yet not be seduced by rhetoric – especially their own.

Myth and *mousikē*

Ancient Greeks turned repeatedly to the network of traditional stories which we call ‘myth’ as a shared means of performing and understanding their collective identity, both as members of their own particular citizen-state (*polis*) and, increasingly, as part of a larger Panhellenic community. The community ‘of all Greek-speakers’ was always more idea or ideal than reality, but none the less powerful for that reason; its vision of a shared, embattled, Greek civilisation (spanning the world but beset by uncivilised outsiders) was underpinned in large part by the shared traditions of myth, traditions which have also done much to determine the lasting influence and fascination exerted by Greek civilisation on later ages.³¹

In myth, the first teachers are the Muses, daughters of Zeus. Their first pupils are the poets, on whom they confer the task and power of honouring them and especially their mother, Memory (Mnemosyne).³² Memory is, from the beginning and almost by definition, both selective and contestable. Not everything can be remembered, and no two people remember the same things in exactly the same way, even if they both recall or rehearse them in the very same words, as in, say, the Jewish ritual of the Seder, in Christian catechisms, or indeed in any two people’s shared narrative of any significant event which they have both experienced.³³ In historiographic terms, there is always less of a clear line than we would like between our memory of how it was and our knowledge of how it must have been, between the historian’s ‘what happened’ and the poet’s ‘what tends to happen’.³⁴

A relevant nexus of ideas is nicely crystallised in Arthur Conan Doyle’s early Sherlock Holmes story ‘The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual’.³⁵ A family hold an ancient precious object in trust for its owner’s descendants; a ritualised memory-formula encoding both duty and location has been passed down from heir to heir, but has long since lost meaning for them and comes to seem merely a quaint trapping of their family’s antiquity, so it takes an outsider to recognise the ‘ritual’ as containing a treasure map. The interloper, however, activates the ‘memory’ only in part – the treasure’s location, not its rightful owner – and thus of course comes to a bad end. Perils attend

both the loss of our own cultural memory and attempts to appropriate memory which is not our own.

Thus the Muses are daughters of memory, but another important role of theirs is to bring forgetfulness of troubles: this tension is underlined by the rhyming Greek words *Mnēmosynē* (Memory) and *lēmosynē* (forgetfulness) at the beginnings of lines 54 f. of the *Theogony*. The capital *M* is significant; capitalisation is a convention introduced into the Greek text by modern editors, but here it conveys the important point (made clear in the Greek by the close coupling of *lēmosynē* with the neuter noun *ampauma* ‘rest’, ‘relief’) that while Memory is a divine person, forgetfulness is merely a thing. Memory transcends humanity; forgetting is a balm on which human individuals intermittently depend. These ideas are developed further in *Theogony* 98–103. The Muses’ twin powers of memory and oblivion parallel their disconcerting power to impart both truth and falsehood, *Theogony* 27 f.; poetry is both the font of wisdom and the font of deceit.

Hesiod’s reflections on the ambivalent role of poetry in exercising external control over what we do, and do not, remember prefigures and influences Plato’s critique of writing in his dialogue *Phaedrus*, where, in the ‘Egyptian story’ told by Socrates, writing is diagnosed as being not what its inventor claims, a ‘memory drug’, but rather a ‘reminder drug’ which ultimately leads to complacent forgetfulness (274e–275a). Plato’s critique of writing is a critique of cultural memory in general, of all that is recalled from a tradition within which it is rooted, as opposed to springing from an individual’s immediate intellectual apprehension.³⁶ The service of the Muses is *mousikē*, very roughly translatable as ‘Muse-craft’ and the origin of the English word ‘music’ – which was one aspect of *mousikē* – but is also one of the Greek words which, in some contexts at least, may be roughly translated as ‘education’ (alongside, in particular, the near-synonyms *paideia* and *paideusis*, terms which etymologically denote the conduct of a person through childhood, and which come to mean all that goes into the formation of the adult). In early Greece, anyone who aspired to maintain the traditions of wisdom and understanding represented by the Muses and Memory required *mousikē* in order to do so, and those with exceptional command of these traditions acquired corresponding prestige and authority.³⁷

Mousikē in its widest sense (encompassing, in modern terms, all nurture that goes beyond purely physical sustenance and protection, and the whole process of socialisation and education) was, and remains, a necessity. Since humans are social animals, human

individuals require at least some connection with human traditions concerning both practical techniques and social conventions in order to develop as humans, at however basic a level. This fact has provided a theme for stories of feral children, told as fiction or as fact, from antiquity to the present.

These include the omni-curious Greek historian Herodotus' (fifth century bc) famous tale of an experiment supposedly carried out by the Egyptian king Psammetichos I (664–610 bc). The king wanted to know if the Egyptians really were, as they believed, the most ancient people in the world, so he devised and conducted an experiment: if two newborn babies were raised in isolation from human society and human speech, what would their first word be? The answer (when the children were aged two) was *bekos*, which turned out to be the Phrygian word for bread: so (if we accept the experiment's remarkable assumptions)³⁸ Phrygian was shown to be the oldest language, and the Phrygians therefore the most ancient of peoples: Egypt had to accept second place. Tales of wild boys, or wolf-children, came into particular vogue again (after numerous intervening examples, not least the Roman foundation-myth of Romulus and Remus) in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European Enlightenment, where interestingly we find a fascination not so much with the development of humanity itself as with its pre-human substrate: children emerge (or are taken) from the wild walking on all fours, and without any grasp of, or disposition to acquire, human speech.³⁹

Mousikē could, however, also be elaborated as a luxury to an arbitrarily high level: an individual's attainment in *mousikē* was an index both of their own personal leisure time and of their family's resources and consequent ability to amass cultural capital, whether by their own creative efforts or through their ability to enlist the services of artists and experts such as seers, poets, thinkers, dancing-instructors and athletic trainers. (*Mousikē* goes hand in hand with *gymnastikē* – 'exercise of the naked body', the ancestor of the English word 'gymnastics' – which develops the body and aligns it with tradition, just as *mousikē* does for the mind.)⁴⁰

In his re-imagining, already mentioned above, of the funeral speech for the fallen delivered by Pericles at the end of the first full year of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides has this great aristocratic yet democratically-minded politician make the striking claim that Athens is 'the education of Greece' (*tēs Hellados paideusis*, 2.41.1). Of course, Thucydides portrays Pericles as a statesman who is a brilliant leader not least because he is a brilliant publicist or 'spin-doctor', capable of making impossibly idealistic views of the world appear at least

temporarily real, of conjuring inspirational visions – both physical, in the form of great building programmes on the Acropolis and elsewhere, and imaginary, in his eloquent articulation of the city's democratic values and destiny – in order to motivate his fellow citizens to fight and die. ⁴¹ This book aims to shed light on this striking claim by suggesting ways in which, first and foremost, Athens as a city was the education of *Athens* – in other words, of the Athenian citizens.⁴²

A more traditional and less controversial assertion than that made by Thucydides' Pericles would have been that Homer was the education of Greece: 'from the beginning, everyone has learned in accordance with Homer', as the iconoclastic poet-philosopher Xenophanes of Kolophon (sixth–fifth century bc) put it.⁴³ In order to understand what it meant to learn from Athens, we need first to reassess the implications of 'learning from Homer', and to review some of the cultural filters and channels through which Homeric and other models had passed by the early fifth century bc.

Heroic politics

The examples offered by the Homeric poems are arresting today and were all the more so for the ancient Greeks, whose sense of a shared culture they helped to define.⁴⁴ They offer striking emblems of aristocratic and heroic ideals of leadership: glorious individuals, protected (or sometimes persecuted) by the gods, often themselves of divine ancestry, and standing as far above common humanity as the gods in turn stand above them: for example, Achilles, educated from birth to be a 'speaker of words and doer of deeds' (*Iliad* 9.443) and discovered by his comrades, when he has withdrawn from the fighting and they come seeking to win him back, singing the 'famous deeds of men' (9.189), whose choice of a short life of glory in preference to old age and obscurity is clear-sighted, but perhaps only becomes fully real to him in his encounter with his mortal enemy Priam in the poem's final book, where the aged king in his distress for the loss of his son Hektor reminds Achilles in turn of the father to whom he can bring no comfort and whom he will never see again. Then there is Odysseus, hero of the epic, which inaugurates Western literature, of quest, homecoming and self-discovery – the lone, wandering King of Ithaca whose aim is to win 'his own survival and a safe return for his comrades' (*Odyssey* 1.5), but who achieves only the former, and whose slaughter of his wife's suitors with the aid of his son and loyal servants leads to a notoriously ambiguous resolution with the people of Ithaca

as a community in the final book.⁴⁵ In the *Iliad*, Odysseus is the shrewd and effective second-rank commander who steps in when supreme commander Agamemnon unwisely tests his army with a disingenuous suggestion that they call off the war and return home. Chaos ensues, and Odysseus goes round the camp to restore order. When he meets kings or other men of rank, he rallies them by reminding them of their duty to restrain their troops, and of the superior status of Agamemnon (2.188–97). His encounters with common soldiers, on the other hand, take a different turn:⁴⁶

Whenever he met a man of the common people
(*dēmos*) and found him shouting out,

he would strike him with his staff and cry out to
him in words of command:

‘What’s wrong with you?⁴⁷ Sit still and listen to
the commands of others

who are better than you – you have no fighting
skill and no courage

and have never counted for anything in war or
in counsel.

We cannot all be kings, all us Akhaians here:

leadership by many is no good; there should be
one ruler, one king,

to whom it has been given by Zeus, son of crook-
witted Kronos. (2.198–205)

The poet goes on to describe Odysseus’ climactic encounter with one insubordinate commoner in particular, the ugly but vocal Thersites, an incident to which we will return.

At first sight, then, what we find in the epics is a monolithic aristocratic ideology which values established hierarchy and individual excellence, where excellence is taken to be determined both by actual ability and by the publicly accepted pecking order, and where the relationship between these two factors is in principle left unquestioned – hence the catastrophic power of the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles in Book 1, which rips the two apart from one another and thus lays bare the ideological mechanism. But the

politics of the Homeric epics is, of course, by no means as simple as that. It is taken for granted, for example, that, in human (and specifically male) excellence, competence in public counsel and debate is the counterpart to fighting prowess; hence Achilles' training as a 'speaker of words and doer of deeds', while debates and assemblies are crucial to the dynamic of both epics.⁴⁸ And we see that common soldiers are simply assumed to be aware of, interested in, and liable to comment on the commanders' policy decisions, however little notice may in practice be taken of what they say. The hierarchy is clearly recognised by all and presented as commanding general assent – as shown by the common soldiers' approval when Odysseus chastises the insubordinate Thersites (2.271–7) – but its authority is far from being so absolute as to make it exempt from any need for defence or reinforcement.

Thus the Homeric epics represent a traditional, divinely sanctioned aristocratic social order, but one in which tensions and fault lines are constantly apparent. Of course, these epics are not primarily vehicles for political or social commentary; their main priorities and emphases lie elsewhere. But just as they represent the hinge, or threshold, between the other-time of myth and heroes and the here-and-now of 'people like us', so they combine a vision of a timeless traditional society with intimations of instability and change;⁴⁹ factors include the different historical layers reflected in the epic tradition and the social realities and conflicts of the time when the poems were composed in their current form, as well as the perspective and literary purposes of the poet(s) themselves. Dieter Hertel has shown, for instance, how an analysis of the narrative of the *Iliad* at the level of deep structure may offer a glimpse of cultural response to social change, and thus of ideology in the making, in the border zone of history and prehistory. Thus the almost-superhuman warrior Achilles looks very much like the original protagonist in a fairly simple folkloric story of a revenge-raid to recover a stolen bride and stolen treasure. The logic of this story-pattern demands, however, that his main antagonist should not be Hektor but Paris, the thief (and figure of armed resistance: his alternative name, Alexandros, means 'warder-off of men/warriors' in Greek). And in the Epic Cycle it is indeed Paris/Alexandros who is credited with killing Achilles in the end. In the *Iliad*, by contrast, Paris takes a back seat in favour of his stronger, more valiant and more admirable brother Hektor, the family man (as shown in the almost unbearably poignant scene in which he takes leave of his wife and infant child for the last time in *Iliad* 6) and last hope of his fellow-citizens, whose death in Book 22 makes the city's fall inevitable (as Hektor himself had already foreseen it was at 6.448

f.). Hektor's name seems to mean 'keeper', 'preserver'; it is derived from the Greek verb *ekhō* (earlier **hekhō*, earlier still **sekhō*) 'hold, have, preside over'.

Hertel suggests that Hektor is a relative newcomer to the story, who reflects the emerging ideology of the citizen-community, the *polis*, and its concomitant ideals of solidarity and self-sacrifice on behalf of the community.⁵⁰ What might have been a relatively simple tale of an aristocratic vendetta is thus transformed into a tragic story in which a vengeful warrior-leader fighting in a just cause is pitched against a stalwart defender who is prevented, for complex reasons, from returning the abducted bride and stolen property, but is motivated by an overriding obligation to defend his city and fellow-citizens to the end at whatever cost to himself. Though Hektor fails and pays with his life, he exemplifies an ideal of self-sacrifice on behalf of the community, contrasting with the selfish individualism which Achilles – for all his nobility, and for all the emotional depth of his partial reconciliation with Priam in Book 24 – can never, as the representative of an older world-order, fundamentally transcend.

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' reassertion of his own sole rulership on his return to Ithaca at the end of the poem is triumphant, and it is achieved with divine aid and sanction in the form of the intervention of his divine protectress Athene. It is also strikingly and disturbingly bloody and, what is worse from the point of view of ancient Greek audiences, unseemly. The scene is set by the description of the death of Odysseus' first victim, the suitors' ringleader, Antinoös:

He [Odysseus] spoke, and directed a sharp arrow
at Antinoös.

He [Antinoös] was on the point of lifting a fine
goblet,

A gold one, double-handled, and he held it in his
hands

Ready to drink wine – of death in his heart

he had no thought. Who, among men enjoying a
feast, would imagine

that a single man among those many – however
strong he might be –

would bring evil death upon him, and the black
spirit of doom?

But Odysseus took aim and struck him in the
throat with an arrow,

and the point passed right through the soft flesh
of the neck.

He slumped to one side, and the cup fell from his
hands

as the blow struck him, and at once a thick jet
sprang from his nostrils

of human blood; he quickly thrust the table
away from him

pushing it with his feet, and he scattered the
food on the ground;

the bread and the cooked meats were befouled.
(*Odyssey* 22.8–21)

Of course this is at one level a supremely fitting end for someone who has for so long, and so grossly, violated the principles of *xenia*, the divinely-sanctioned bond, and the rules of conduct, between guest and host.⁵¹ On the other hand, here – and in ensuing incidents such as the killing of the suitor Eurymachos at 22.81–8 – a description of slaughter of a type which on the battlefield of the *Iliad* would have seemed disturbingly vivid, yes, but at the same time relatively neutral and matter-of-fact – takes on a special horror when transferred to a domestic setting. Not a moment intervenes between peaceful fellowship and death; gore and the festive meal are mingled on the ground. However much it may be justified by the suitors' prior conduct, it is hard to see this violation of norms and proprieties as being satisfactorily resolved when Penelope's disloyal maid-servants, who have first been made to assist in removing the corpses, clearing away the debris and sweeping the floor clean, are then themselves executed by slow hanging.⁵²

The returning Odysseus is the just king restored and the rightful owner vindicated, but he is also placed in the role of the evil that springs from nowhere, the unlooked-for assassin in the crowd (suggestive from a modern perspective of the lone psychopathic

killer); his role is para-human, that of an *Ungeheuer*, and reminds us how fine the line is between divine justice and monstrous retribution. We might compare this with the moment in Plato's dialogue *Gorgias* where Socrates deflates his young interlocutor Polos' naive admiration for the absolute power of an autocratic tyrant by likening it to the power of a man in a crowded marketplace, whose claim that he can 'do as he likes' with his fellow-citizens rests simply on the fact that he has a dagger hidden under his cloak (*Gorgias* 469c–e). Absolute power and insanity are near neighbours. Plato's deluded would-be assassin provides a sinister negative counterpart to the madcap power and liberty enjoyed by some of the protagonists of Aristophanic comedy: in Plato's analysis, the extreme of democratic liberty also keeps company with tyranny – and with madness. In the *Odyssey*, once the suitors are dead and their remains disposed of, the ensuing resolution is, as readers and scholars have long observed, far from being fully satisfactory. We are also left with the knowledge from Teiresias' prophecy in Book 11, that, even now, Odysseus is not here to stay and rule his kingdom in peace, but instead is destined to go on another strange quest into unknown lands, and to die a mysterious death after his return (though at a ripe old age, and leaving his people in prosperity).⁵³

Thus, like the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* points, ambiguously and intermittently but insistently, to a post-heroic world – an aftermath of the great events and destinies narrated within it – which will inevitably require a new accommodation between the interests of the exceptional individual and the interests of the community. (This renunciation of closure is a factor in the extraordinary fertility of the Homeric epics as sources of plots for tragedy and comedy.) The proleptic and pregnant quality of both epics is also symbolised by significant semi-absent presences within each of them: the ordinary people. In the *Iliad*, the mass of the people, the *laos* or *dēmos*, are generally nameless – with the exception of Thersites, who disappears from view after he is rebuked by Odysseus in Book 2.⁵⁴ Their most frequent appearance is in the phrase *poimen-a/-i laōn* 'shepherd of the people', a formula designating a commander, and in related expressions ('leader of the people', 'orderer of the people', etc.). Among their other regular functions are to be impersonally 'rallied', 'urged on', or 'pressed' one way or another by their leaders, or, quite simply, to be killed (so, programmatically, at 1.10: 'and the people were being destroyed').⁵⁵

The absent collectivity of the *Odyssey* is put before us in the poem's prologue: it is Odysseus' companions, the *hetairoi*, whose safe homecoming he aims from the start to win for them (1.5), but who

perish in the end ‘by reason of their own recklessness’ (1.7) – an assertion which the poem’s audience is repeatedly invited to question in the course of its account of Odysseus’ wanderings. Odysseus does bear, and acknowledge, a degree of responsibility,⁵⁶ but in general the companions are indeed allowed to perform a collective self-erasure, being shown to be no less mindless than they are, for the most part, nameless.⁵⁷ Through their folly, the complement of Odysseus’ shrewdness, they write – or rather perform – themselves out of the story.

Hesiod’s poetics of struggle

Hand in hand with the Homeric epics go the didactic poems of Hesiod: the *Theogony*, which unfolds the origins of the universe, the successive dynasties which have ruled heaven, and the genealogy of the gods, and the *Works and Days*, an enigmatic work (to modern eyes at least) which combines very ancient traditions of wisdom-literature (recording auspicious and inauspicious days, weather-signs, astrological lore and the like) with a much more individual account of humanity’s place in the world and the necessary means of survival, along with some strikingly original retellings and reinterpretations of poetic myth.⁵⁸

Hesiod’s poems, the *Works and Days* in particular, give expression to an ethos of individual resistance to the bitter end in the face of a hostile natural world, the arbitrary and ruthless power of human ‘kings’, and, presiding over all, a divine government which, although originally and ultimately rooted in justice, is now partly inscrutable, partly indifferent, and in part actively hostile to humanity in the face of the manifest moral inadequacy of people as they are now. His emphasis on the stark contrast between the powerless but toiling individual on the one hand and impervious autocratic authority – human or divine – on the other might suggest that his poems would have little part to play in relation to the emergent models of citizenship and communal authority with which we are concerned, and it is true that they lent themselves to being invoked by conservative voices in subsequent centuries as exemplars of a system of traditional values and sense of natural hierarchy which seemed to have been lost in new more fluid societies such as the Athenian democracy. The *Works and Days* in particular does, however, have important resonances in the emerging ideology of the *polis*, in particular, as will be seen below, in Solon’s elegies. Particularly significant is Hesiod’s discovery, in the *Works and Days*, of a ‘second

variety' of Eris, 'Strife' or 'Competition':

So there was not, it turns out, a single breed of
Strifes: no, on this earth

there are two: there's one you'd commend when
you notice it,

while the other deserves criticism; they are quite
different in spirit.

The first is the one who sends us evil war and
conflict

without mercy. No mortal likes her. It is
Necessity

and the will of the immortals that makes us
honour oppressive Strife.

The other, though, is the older daughter of
darkest Night,

and Kronos' son seated on high who dwells in
heaven installed her

in the very roots of the earth, and she is much
better for men:

she rouses even a man without skill to work all
the same,

because one who has no work looks to his fellow
man

who is wealthy, and strives forward to plough
and sow

and set his house in order. Neighbour vies with
neighbour

in striving for prosperity: this Strife is good for
mortals.

Potter is at odds with potter, craftsman with
craftsman,

beggar bears grudge against beggar and singer
against singer. (*Works and Days* 11–26)

The Second Strife offers, by contrast with the individual competitive ethos of war or athletic games in which there is one victor, one prize, a model of competition which, while still at base individualistic self-aggrandizing, ultimately serves the common good by advancing a collective endeavour and further developing a technique or craft which is greater than, and will outlast, its individual practitioners.⁵⁹ Similarly the myth of Prometheus' ambiguous benefactions to humanity, told in both *Theogony* and *Works and Days* but in significantly different ways, points to an ideal of collective striving and aspiration to transcend the constraints of the human lot on earth, bitter and much-emphasised though those constraints are.⁶⁰

Archaic lyric: Between kings and cities

The ambiguity of the heroic models presented by epic are underlined in the archaic period, where the personal voice of the poet, or of her or his persona, emerges more and more insistently. The aristocratic warrior-poet Arkhilokhos (seventh century bc), famous in antiquity for his broken-off engagement to a girl called Neoboule and subsequent persecution of her and her family in savagely abusive verse, was also capable of critiquing the values of the aristocracy to which he belonged. In one much-quoted poem, he admits having left his shield in the hands of an enemy – a sign of having fled the battlefield in disorder, and therefore, usually, of the utmost disgrace – but shrugs it off with apparent indifference: 'I'll buy another one just as good' (Arkhilokhos 5). Elsewhere he expresses pragmatic and cynical rejection of the Homeric ideal of the tall, godlike military commander:

I don't approve of a tall general with a long
stride

or one who's vain of his flowing hair, or has hair
selectively shaved.

I'd prefer someone short, with a bandy look

round the calves, standing firm on his feet, full
of courage.⁶¹

The poem is probably incomplete, and it may well have gone on to

identify the short, bandy-legged commander with some real individual known to the poet, but a Greek reader/hearer could not help but be reminded of the one notably ugly character in the *Iliad*, the insubordinate rank-and-file soldier Thersites, and in particular of the episode in Book 2 where Odysseus reprimands Thersites for speaking out of turn (2.211–77). But it may also remind us of another famous episode, the *teikhoskopia*, when Helen, standing on the walls of Troy, identifies Greek heroes on the plain below at King Priam's request. When she points out Odysseus, the Trojan elder Antenor confirms her identification: he has seen Odysseus before when he came on an embassy to Troy. When Odysseus got up to speak, Antenor recalls, he did not make a great impression visually: 'he would stand there stock-still, like someone who had no idea; you would reckon him to be bad-tempered, and stupid as well' (3.220 f.). The moment he began to speak, however, his words fell like snow, and no one else could compete with him in eloquence (3.222 f.).

Thus Arkhilokhos' poem, while at a surface level simply making a commonplace point about substance being more important than appearances, also points to an inconsistency of value-systems manifested in two famous moments of heroic epic. The ugliness of the insubordinate commoner Thersites is taken to reveal his true nature, a man, as the poet's voice introduces him, 'of unmeasured words' (ἄμετροεπής, 2.212); the unprepossessing first appearance of the hero Odysseus, on the other hand, belies his true quality. We are not told what Odysseus actually said (though obviously the embassy failed, otherwise the war would not have gone ahead); in the case of Thersites, though, his criticisms of Agamemnon's inept leadership are very much on target – and, as has often been pointed out, echo much of what Achilles, the 'best of the Akhaians', has already said in his quarrel with Agamemnon which set the action of the epic in motion.

Once we have observed this, we are driven to reinterpret the descriptions of the two men's appearance: the difference, we realise, is one more of spin than of substance, or, in ancient rhetorical terms, a matter less of subject-matter than of the discourse which is rhetorically appropriate for the subjects, individuals at opposite ends of the army's social spectrum. Thersites, 'the ugliest man who went to Troy', is presented as a grotesque: bow-legged, lame in one foot, with shoulders hunched forward and sparse downy hair on his pointed head (*Iliad* 2.216–19). Odysseus, on the other hand, is observed by Priam as short by comparison with Agamemnon, but with broader shoulders (3.193 f.); Antenor reports that he 'stood still, and looked downwards, fixing his eyes on the ground' (3.217). The effect is very different, and yet, once we attempt to conjure a visual image, we

realise that these could both be portraits of the same man seen through different eyes. In Thersites' case, because of his status, his Achillean rhetoric is simply out of place, counting as 'unmeasured' words, and it is his grotesque appearance that reveals his true nature; in the case of Odysseus, again because of his status, his visual ordinairiness and failure to make a commanding physical impression are rather a foil to the unrivalled eloquence which his 'blizzard of words' represents.

It is worth noting that, while early Greek literature is well stocked with characters of low status who are surprisingly noble in character (Eumaios the swineherd in the *Odyssey*, the princess's peasant-husband in Euripides' *Electra*, etc.), it is harder to think of low-status characters who are surprisingly noble in physical appearance. This ingrained association between physical beauty and status in Greek thought is expressed in the standard phrase *kaloskagathos* 'beautiful-and-good', plural *kaloikagathoi*, used to refer to members of the 'well-born' propertied elite.⁶²

Thersites was apparently 'hated more than anyone by Achilles and by Odysseus' (2.220). The poem tells us that they despise him as their inferior, but it shows us that, as human beings, each of them in different respects resembles him. Returning to Odysseus' encounter with Thersites in Book 2, we find that Odysseus himself is made to acknowledge the double standard he applies, as we see in his opening words at 2.246–50:

Thersites, your assertion is ill-judged, clear
speaker (*ligys agorētēs*) though you are!

Hold back, and do not attempt to strive on your
own against kings.

I say that there is no mortal of worse quality
(*khereioteron*)

than you, of all those who came to Troy with the
sons of Atreus.

That is why you should not raise your voice
against the kings and speak

Odysseus acknowledges Thersites' way with words by describing him in exactly the same terms as the famously eloquent King Nestor, introduced at 1.248 as the 'clear-voiced speaker from Pylos', *ligys*

Pyliōn agorētēs; but in Thersites' case this skill is made irrelevant, indeed inappropriate, by his publicly recognised but ill-defined 'low quality', in other words, low status. Strong irony and ideological tension inheres in the adjective 'on your own', *oios*, in line 247: Thersites has stood up for the many against Agamemnon, who is in the position of the 'one ruler/one king' of lines 204 f. (see above), but Odysseus reasserts the ideological position that the king is in fact the representative, as well as the ruler, of the collective, and thus it is Thersites who is 'out on his own', a position which is affirmed by the general laughter and approval with which Odysseus' physical chastisement of him is greeted (2.270–77).

The political relationship between status, style and political action itself, both in live political situations and in textual reflections or discussions of them, is a theme to which we will return in [Chapter 3](#),⁶³ alongside questions of what counts as command of a political stage and what as mere showmanship, what can be accepted as an authentic performance by whom and in what situations. Against the backdrop of the Homeric vignettes of Thersites' and Odysseus' rhetorical performances as military leaders, Arkhilokhos' lines alert his audience not only to the disjunction between appearance and substance, the importance of 'not judging a book by its cover', but also to the artificiality and negotiability of hierarchies, their dependency on tacit ideological premises, and their capacity to be unravelled by examination, by debate, or simply by changing political realities.

Another strand in this burgeoning critique of the traditional heroic/aristocratic value system is exemplified by the reflections of the Ionian poet-philosopher Xenophanes of Kolophon – best known for his proto-relativist reaction against the anthropomorphic theology of Homer and Hesiod – on the appropriateness of traditional aristocratic models of competition, *agōn* (21 B 2 D–K):

If a man were to win a victory by swiftness of
foot

or in the pentathlon, where Zeus' sanctuary
lies

by the streams of Pisa at Olympia, or wrestling,

or even persevering in a painful boxing-match

or in that dreadful contest they call *pankration*,⁶⁴

he would have greater glory in the eyes of the
citizens

and win conspicuous pride of place at festivals

and there would be food for him from the
public purse

of the city, and whatever prize was set aside for
him –

or if his horses won, he would get all this too –

10

although his worth does not compare to mine.

Better than strength, you see,

of men or of horses is our wisdom (*sophiē*).

There is no reason at all for this practice,⁶⁵ nor
is it fair (*dikaion*)

to give strength preference over excellent
wisdom.

Let there be one among the people who is good
as a boxer

15

or at the pentathlon, or at wrestling,

or at running fast, that which is honoured most

of all the feats of strength that men perform in
the games –

not for this reason would the city be better
governed ('more in *eunomiē*').

There would be little reason for the city to
rejoice about it

20

if someone wins a prize in the games by the
banks of Pisa;⁶⁶

that is not what brings wealth to the city's
backstreets.⁶⁷

Xenophanes' understated, commonsensical commentary makes a highly significant ideological move. The crucial juncture is line 11: 'not being worthy as I am' (οὐκ ἔὼν ἄξιός ὥσπερ ἐγώ). Here the philosopher's outright assertion of his own personal excellence as superior to the prowess of athletes prepares the way for the crucial new criterion introduced in line 19 – the contribution this excellence makes to the collective welfare of the community, both to its good governance and to its prosperity (22).

Xenophanes' focus on the *pankration* is rhetorically effective: it is far from being the most prestigious of events at the athletic games, but it is distinctive in being defined, in the popular imagination at least, not by its rules but precisely by its lack of regulation – its lack of *eunomiē*, to anticipate line 19. It is thus a useful background against which to align aristocratic prowess, on the one hand, with the anti-moral principle that might is right, while aligning Xenophanean wisdom, on the other hand, simultaneously with due awareness of overriding moral considerations and with proper attention to and regard for the interests of the community.

Solon: Accommodating Athens to the muse

The distinctive style of the Athenian politician – and, in the estimation of later centuries, sage – Solon (seventh–sixth century bc) is well illustrated in an anecdote, doubtless apocryphal, told by Plutarch in his *Life of Solon* and by the omnivorous and encyclopedic (or Wikipedic, in the light of his open-armed inclusion of material from all sources) philosophical biographer Diogenes Laertius.⁶⁸ The Athenians, we are told, had grown weary of a prolonged war with their neighbour city of Megara over control of the island of Salamis – so weary that they not only made peace, but enacted a law that anyone who so much as suggested laying claim to Salamis again should be put to death. Solon observed that there was a fresh appetite for war among the young men, but that this law was succeeding in its purpose of deterring them from taking action; and so, Plutarch tells

us,

... he made a pretence of having lost his wits, and the story spread from his house around the city that he was in a disturbed state of mind. Meanwhile, he secretly composed elegiac verses and practised in order to recite them from memory. Then he rushed out, all of a sudden, into the agora, wearing a felt cap,⁶⁹ and, as a substantial crowd gathered, he leapt onto the herald's platform and sang the elegy, which is the one which begins (F 1):

'I am a herald myself: I come from lovely Salamis:

but the pattern of my words is a song, instead of a speech'

This is the composition which bears the title 'Salamis', a hundred lines long, and composed with particular charm.⁷⁰

Diogenes Laertius gives us some further lines from the elegy which demonstrate its force and point:

I wish I was a native of Pholegandros or of
Sikinos,

not an Athenian – I want a different homeland!

Otherwise this is what people will soon be
saying:

Him? He's from Attica – you know, the Salamis-
deserters.⁷¹

Irwin has suggested that Solon in this episode casts himself as an Odysseus figure, with the all-important difference that, whereas Odysseus feigned madness to evade war, in an unsuccessful attempt to avoid service at Troy for himself as an individual, Solon feigns madness to enlist in war: in a (successful, so the story has it) attempt to incite his fellow citizens collectively to resume a war which they had abandoned as lost.⁷²

This interpretation of the story has interesting implications for the question of what counts as sane or mad performance by a prominent individual in relation to his responsibilities to the community. Irwin also notes the resonances of the Salamis story with the episode in *Iliad* 2 discussed above, where Odysseus averts disaster in the wake of Agamemnon's disingenuous proposal to end the war (and asserts his kingly and aristocratic authority over the commoner Thersites in the process). Solon, like the Homeric Odysseus, is both an aristocrat and a populist; by contrast with Odysseus, though, his role is not to assert

authoritarian rule through a populist performance of ritual humiliation, but to subvert authority by appealing to popular sentiment through a performance of *self*-humiliation. Comparison with Odysseus' beggar-disguise in the final books of the *Odyssey* is also apt. Odysseus there submits to humiliation, the better, eventually, to reveal himself and his own authority (and as a prelude to the bloody domestic slaughter of the suitors who have usurped his authority, the disturbing aspect of which has been discussed above); Solon submits to humiliation the better to reveal to his fellow-citizens who *they* are, and thus spur them to realise and act on their own authority (hence the strategy of affecting to wish that he hailed from an insignificant island such as Pholegandros or Sikinos).⁷³

Another fragment of elegy, Solon F 4, similarly illustrates Solon's distinctive style and persuasive technique:

Our city, though, shall never be destroyed by
Zeus's

destiny or by the will of the immortal, blessed
gods;

Such is her power, our great-hearted guardian
whose father is mighty,

Pallas Athene, she who holds her hands over
us.

No, it is the citizens themselves in their folly⁷⁴
who wish to destroy

our great city – since they rely on their
possessions –

together with the wrong intent of the people's
leaders, whose

great outrages are set to bring on them much
pain:

they do not know how to restrain greed or to
enjoy

present pleasures decently, in leisured
feasting . . .

. . . they are rich, since they rely on wrong
actions . . .

neither sacred treasures nor public wealth
are spared from their plunder as they grab things
this side and that,

and they do not preserve the sacred laws of
Rightness,

who says nothing, but knows what happens and
has happened,

and always comes, in time, bringing redress.

For every city, this injury comes and cannot be
avoided,

and soon it leads to foul slavery,

which wakes division between neighbours and
sleeping conflict,

which for many men brings an end to joyful
youth.

At the hands of enemies the lovely city is swiftly

worn down as men gather who do wrong to
their friends.⁷⁵

these are the troubles at large among the people
(*dēmos*); as for the poor,

many of them end up in foreign lands

trafficked and bound in disfiguring chains . . .

Thus public (*dēmosion*) trouble comes to each
person in their own home

and the courtyard doors will not keep it out
any more;

it leaps over a high wall, and finds you, come

what may,
even if someone takes refuge in a corner of the
bedroom.
My heart commands me to teach (*didaxai*) this to
the Athenians,
how Mis-Rule (*Dysnomiē*) causes most trouble
of all for the city,
while Good-Rule (*Eunomiē*) makes everything
appear orderly and in place,
and regularly has wrongdoers put in bonds.
It smooths the rough, stops excess, obliterates
violence,
and withers the flowers of Ruin (*Atē*) in the
bud;
puts crooked judgements straight, replaces
overbearing acts
with gentleness. It stops the action of
divisiveness,
stops the anger of harsh strife; under its sway
all human life is governed by order and good
sense.

Authority in Solon's elegies is consistently inverted and devolved; his poems adopt a loud voice, as it were, but demand that their audience make that voice their own and require them to take responsibility for fulfilling and enforcing its injunctions – and developing them into the future. Solon's longest surviving elegy, *Justice* or *Hymn to the Muses* (F 13), is a good example of this; I cite it here in full because it is a powerful example of Solon's subtle didactic manner, and because it is less often discussed as a whole than might be expected.⁷⁶ It can be read both as a powerful piece of protreptic oratory in itself and as an extended commentary on Hesiod's teaching at the beginning of *Works and Days* about the two breeds of Strife (*Eris*, 11–34) and later about the line between Shame and Shamelessness (*Aidōs/Anaideiē*, 317–26):

Glorious children of Memory (*Mnēmosynē*) and
Olympian Zeus,

Pierian Muses, listen to my prayer:

in the name of the blessed gods, give me
prosperity, and let me

keep a good name among all humanity;

be as a sweet taste to my friends, bitter to
enemies,

5

and a sight for my friends to respect, for
enemies to fear.

Possessions? I long to have them, but to gain
them wrongly

I refuse; punishment always follows after.

And wealth? if gods give it, it stands secure by a
man

from its very base up to the highest point;

10

but wealth which men prize out of reckless
violence (*hybris*), no order

attends it; instead, the influence of wrongful
actions

makes it follow a man unwillingly, and it soon
gets mixed up with destruction:

from a small start it grows, as a fire does;

feeble at first, in the end it brings destruction:

15

not for long do the products of violence
(*hybris*) last among mortals;

no, Zeus has his eye on the outcome of
everything, and just as, all of a

sudden, a wind scatters the clouds in a single
moment

in spring, when it stirs the surging tireless sea

from its very depth, and over the corn-yielding
earth

20

lays waste to fair worked farmlands, till it
reaches the gods' high seat,

the heaven, and then makes clear sky visible
once again:

and the son's force shines out over the rich land

in its beauty, and there is no longer any cloud
to be seen.

Such is the redress (*tisis*) of Zeus; not every
occasion

25

prompts him, like a mortal man, to grow sharp
in anger,

but no one can hide from him forever through to
the end, if his heart

is wicked: come what may, he is exposed in
the end.

This one pays right away, this one pays later,
and if there are some

who get away with it themselves, without
divine lot coming down to find them,

30

it comes all the same afterwards: their actions

are paid for by blameless

children of theirs or descendants in
generations to come.

But that's how we mortals think, good people
and bad alike:

all's well if each alone is thought respectable –
until something goes wrong. Then we look back
and complain. But up till then

35

we revel open-mouthed in empty hopes.

And anyone who is oppressed by painful disease

thinks only of the moment when he will be
cured;

another who is a coward imagines being brave,

and one with no pleasing appearance imagines
he is handsome;

40

and whoever lacks property and is pressed by
poverty's toil

imagines he can surely acquire plenty of
wealth.

People strive forward this way and that. There's
one who roams the sea

in ships, aiming to bring profits home

from the fishes' home, tossed by the bitter
winds,

45

and sets no store by sparing his own life;

another clears forested land and all year round

toils over it – these are the men who work
with crooked ploughs;

another learns the arts of Athene and of crafty

Hephaistos, and uses his hands to make his
living;

50

another has learned their gifts from the
Olympian Muses,

and understands the measure (*metron*) of
longed-for wisdom;

another has been made a prophet by Lord Apollo
who works from afar,

and knows harm coming to a man when it is
still remote,

when the gods are assisting him – but all the
same what is fated

55

no bird of omen can deflect, nor any rituals;

there are others who do the work of Paian of
many drugs,

doctors: but for them there is no sure outcome
to their work;

often from a small pain great suffering grows,

and none can relieve it by giving gentle drugs,

60

while another man racked by fierce and painful
illness

a touch of the doctor's hands can make well in

a flash.

It is Fate that brings to mortals both good and
bad alike:

there is no escaping the gifts of the immortal
gods.

In every venture there is risk, and no-one knows

65

where it will end at the moment something
starts:

no, there's one who sets out to behave well and
unexpectedly

falls into deep destructive ruin,

while another behaves badly, but god surrounds
him

with the gift of good fortune, a liberation from
folly.

70

As for wealth, it has no finishing-line that has
been revealed to men:

the ones among us who have the greatest
livelihood

strive forward twice as much. Who could satisfy
them all?

The immortals grant gain to mortals,
but from it ruin appears, and whenever Zeus

75

sends ruin for redress (*teisomenēn*), one man
gets it, then another.⁷⁷

The elegy begins as a modest prayer for a secure place in the human

social world, held in respect and embedded in the natural communal order of peaceable coexistence among friends and enemies alike (*ekhthroi*, enemies in peace, are distinguished linguistically in Greek from *polemioi*, enemies in war). The picture is not an unrealistically idealistic one: fear and even bitter resentment are not incompatible with civic harmony, there is a place for them in the midst of it. The potential disturbing factor is in fact material wealth, introduced not as a straightforward blessing to be prayed for, but as the object of a desire which the poet acknowledges but which immediately prompts thoughts of caution; wealth is the thing which can overthrow the delicate balance of society, and, with the best will in the world – even the poet's own – it is not easy to recognise with certainty the difference between the secure wealth which the gods mean us to have and the ruinous wealth which we arrogate to ourselves against their will. Unjust wealth brings down punishment not merely on the individual human scale but with the force of nature, the force of fire and storm. The threat of such punishment is such that the initial qualified hope for wealth – that is, for wealth if truly god-given – fades into a generalised attitude of fear. Since divine retribution, though sure, is slow – delayed perhaps even to a future generation – in matters of wealth we can never genuinely 'count our blessings'. The closest, then, that we can come to security is in the recognition that our striving is no different from the striving of all our fellow mortals, our situation as we face the uncertainty of the competitive world no better (and so, we may perhaps hope, also no worse) than theirs. Even the experts, controllers of *tekhnē* – poets, prophets, doctors – are distinguished at most by knowledge of the limits of their art: wisdom exists within measure (*metron*), the future even if known cannot be changed, the outcome even of the most skilful medical treatment is uncertain. Risk alone is universal (65); time in its extended aspect, *khronos*, is controlled only by the gods. Human attempts to commoditise it, to build wealth as security against time, are doomed to failure. It is in the moment, *kairos*, that such prosperity as we have resides, since it is in the actions of an instant, what we do all at once (*aipsa* 'in a flash', 62, cf. 'all of a sudden . . . in a single moment', *exapinēs* . . . *aipsa*, of the action of Zeus in 17–18), that the fleeting reality of human success has its tenuous hold; 'haste' or ambition, *speudein* (43, 73), is a vain attempt to extend or defer the moment into time. The prayer for individual advantage thus effectively cancels itself: it is best not to seek more, since even virtue offers no certain outcome (67–70), but simply to accept the coexistence of all our ambitions, to acknowledge that positions will shift and hierarchies be reversed, and to hope that measure itself will be preserved, that this pattern of change in personal fortunes will not be overwhelmed by

any individual whose rise and fall brings calamity on all alike. The elegiac prayer, characteristically self-effacing, provides an effective background to the more overtly political elegies which we will explore more fully below.

Solon stands at the very beginning of what might count as the historical record, and has one foot at least in the world of myth. None the less, the evidence we have for his political interventions, diverse and fragmentary though it is, creates a fascinating and remarkably coherent picture of a statesman whose extraordinary achievement is to serve as the perfect role-model for the individual citizen by simultaneously asserting and ironically undercutting the role of the exceptional individual leader. He is more than just a model for roles such as that of Theseus the democratic king in Euripides' *Suppliants* and other tragedies, or for the more problematic figure of Pericles the virtuous monarch-demagogue in Thucydides' *History*. Solon creates, occupies, and then leaves useably vacant the stage on which the drama of Athenian democratic citizenship is to unfold.

Notes

- 1 Characterisation of Athens as 'the first democracy' requires qualification (a) because democratic institutions emerged and spread among other Greek city-states independently at around the same time (see especially Robinson 1997, 2011), and (b) because many societies other than those of ancient Greece have independently, and in some cases earlier, developed political systems which can reasonably be called democratic. Thorkald Jacobsen argued in 1943 that 'primitive democracy' was attested in ancient Mesopotamia (Jacobsen 1943), and the argument for forms of democracy (without the loaded adjective 'primitive') in the ancient Near East has been developed in different ways by scholars including Daniel Fleming (Fleming 2004) and Benjamin Isakhan (Isakhan 2011, 2012). For wider critique of Hellenocentric views of the history of democracy, see Isakhan and Stockwell 2011, and of the ideology which goes hand in hand with such views, Vlassopoulos 2007. Notwithstanding these qualifications, the claim of Athens remains strong, in view of the scale of its democracy, the range of contemporary evidence, and its influence in promulgating both the term and the idea. Besides non-Athenian traditions of democracy, there are, of course, widely varying traditions in the reception of ancient democracy; see for instance Ober and Hedrick 1996, on North America, and Khalidi 2003, on Al-Fārābī in tenth-century Baghdad.
- 2 The distinction between 'knowing how' and 'knowing that' is vital to this study. The intellectual habit (whose roots go back to Plato and beyond) of regarding 'knowing that' as primary, and of trying to construe 'knowing how' as simply derived from it, was acutely criticised by Gilbert Ryle in his presidential address to the Aristotelian Society in 1945 (Ryle 1945–46). Ryle's account of the difference between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' has been the subject of much debate (see e.g. Snowdon 2004, Wiggins 2012); the key points, that there

‘has been a long-standing prejudice in favour of ‘knowing that’, and that ‘knowing how’ is *not*, in fact, straightforwardly reducible to ‘knowing that’, remain valid.

- 3 οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίῃ· εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω,/ εἷς βασιλεύς. The episode in which these words appear is discussed further below; as will be seen, they are lightly ironic in their original context since Odysseus is here taking the lead himself and disciplining the Greek troops in place of the king-commander Agamemnon when the latter’s plans spectacularly backfire. In his discussion of different types of democracy in Book 4 of the *Politics*, Aristotle muses in a semi-serious aside (1292a13) on whether Homer’s term ‘command-by-many’ (πολυκοιρανίῃ) refers to ‘despotic’ democracy (‘command of The Many’, i.e. the many ruling autocratically *as one*, cf. ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’) or simply to democracy as distributed authority (‘many individuals in command’). (See below on conflicting conceptions of the *demos* as singular or plural.) In *Metaphysics* (12 (Λ) 1076a4) Aristotle invokes the line again to caution, light-heartedly also, against the causally fragmented ‘episodic’ world for which he criticises his rival, Plato’s nephew and successor Speusippos: ‘the universe does not accept bad government’ (τὰ δὲ ὄντα οὐ βούλεται πολιτεύεσθαι κακῶς). Aristotle’s own pupil Theophrastos, on the other hand, identifies it as the watchword of his ‘oligarchical man’ – and the only line of Homer he can quote (*Characters* 26.2), an ignorance which shows this type’s ‘lack of concern for civilised values’ (Diggle 2004: 467). The line later prospers as a rhetorical maxim and proverb: see e.g. Stobaeus 4.6.1 (heading the section ‘monarchy is best’, ὅτι κάλλιστον ἡ μοναρχία). The irony of the situation was noted by the author of the Roman-period *Art of Rhetoric* falsely attributed to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who interprets Odysseus’ words as an instance of the device of λόγος ἑσχηματισμένος (‘feigned discourse’), addressing to the mass of the army a rebuke really meant for the ears of his insubordinate fellow commanders ([D.H.] *Ars rhet.* 9.8.4–38).
- 4 E.g. ‘. . . we alone (μόνοι) see anyone who avoids politics as leading not a private life, but a pointless life . . . we alone (μόνοι) give aid without fear, guided not by calculated advantage but by confidence in our freedom . . . Athens alone (μόνη) exceeds its reputation when put to the test, and alone (μόνη) gives enemy aggressors no cause to resent who they are harmed by, and our subjects no cause to resent who they are ruled by’ (2.40–41). The eulogy for the dead, *epitaphios*, played a particularly important role in articulating and shaping the Athenians’ sense of their own uniqueness (Lorau 1986 (1981)). On the contradictions and ironies which undercut Pericles’ portrait of Athenian exceptionalism in this speech, see e.g. Most 2006.
- 5 The public rhetoric of other early Greek democracies is sadly not preserved. Robinson 2000 argues that our evidence for the most powerful such city outside Athens, Syracuse, shows features of a democratic ideology recognisably similar to Athens’; in both cases, though, the sources tend to be hostile and negative stereotypes are clearly at work. On Syracusan democracy, see further Robinson 2011: 67–92.
- 6 On autochthony and democratic ideology, see e.g. Lorau 2000, Pelling 2009; critique from a Marxist perspective, Rose 2012: 324–6.
- 7 ἔν μὲν τόδ’ ἡμῖν ὥσπερ ἐν πεσσοῖς δίδωσ/ κρείσσον. πῶς ἂν μὴ διορθεύων λόγους/ ὀρθῶς δύναιτ’ ἂν δῆμος εὐθύνην πόλιν;/ ὁ γὰρ χρόνος μάθησιν ἀντὶ τοῦ τάχους/ κρείσσω δίδωσι. γαπόνος δ’ ἀνὴρ πένης,/ εἰ καὶ γένοιτο μὴ ἀμαθής, ἔργων ὑπο/ οὐκ ἂν δύναίτο πρὸς τὰ κοῖν’ ἀποβλέπειν (417–22). My repetition of ‘order’ in the translation reflects the Greek words *diorthuōn*...

orthōs, ‘straightening through . . . straightly’ or ‘ordering from start to finish . . . in an orderly way’. This language of ‘correct order’/‘straightness’ makes the connection between the governance of discourse and the government of the city, as well as activating the well-worn metaphor contained in the verb *euthunein* ‘guide straight’, ‘steer’, ‘govern’ or (in democratic language) ‘hold to account’. The expression διορθεύων λόγους/ ὀρθῶς may suggest in particular the ‘correct use of words’ (ὀρθότης ὀνομάτων) taught by the sophist Prodikos of Keos (84 A 16 DK), who is mentioned (361) and perhaps parodied (in the contest of *logoi*) in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, the original version of which was staged in 423 bc: cf. Kuntz 1993–94: 164 with n. 6; Carey 2000: 430 f.; Sansone 2004.

- 8 438–441 τοῦλεῦθερον δ’ ἐκεῖνο... τί τούτων ἔστ’ ἰσαίτερον πόλει.
- 9 Criticisms are similarly left hanging in the other most famous dramatised debate in classical Greek literature about the relative merits of political systems in the late fifth century, the Persian ‘constitutional debate’ of Herodotus Book 3 (3.80–82). The herald’s second claim, that those who work for their living have no time for politics, remains a matter of debate among historians of Athenian democracy: see e.g. Ober 2008: 161 f., addressing the (wider) ‘inevitable expert-elite domination argument’ (164) from the specific point of view of access to information.
- 10 The failure of Athenian democracy is dramatised on distinct but systematically related levels in Plato’s *Apology* (process) and in the dialogues *Gorgias* (discourse), *Protagoras* (ideology), *Phaedrus* (social psychology) and *Republic* (morality, epistemology and ontology) among others.
- 11 Jaeger was influenced by the ‘third humanism’ (*Dritter Humanismus*) of the conservative German pedagogue Eduard Spranger (1882–1963), but was not, like Spranger, drawn into radical German nationalism and thus into National Socialist apologetics. He chose instead to advocate academic freedom and oppose Nazi ideology from within the German university system, but his marriage to a Jewish woman, Ruth Heinitz, made eventual emigration inevitable. Park 1983 is a moving account, from a US conservative academic point of view, of how Jaeger put his humanist ideals into practice in his teaching of women students at Radcliffe College.
- 12 Marrou, like Jaeger, was an engaged scholar whose life and work reflected the same ideals, and like Jaeger he opposed National Socialism, in Marrou’s case by involvement in the French Catholic resistance. His broad, humane and critical view of the work of the historian, characterised by gentle but acute critique of the ambitions of positivism, respect for documentary evidence, and profound curiosity about the whole range of human experience, was simultaneously radical and grounded in a strong sense of tradition. See Marrou 1954, esp. 214–35 on ‘the truth of history’ (*la vérité de l’histoire*); Too 2001: 4–10; Riché 2003.
- 13 See further Too 2001: 8.
- 14 Morgan 1998; Criboire 1996, 2001, 2007.
- 15 Ancient resonances multiply, as do the ironies which attend on them. Banners in demonstrations in Athens in 2015 revived the two-and-a-half-millennia-old political slogan σεισάχθεια (‘shaking off of burdens’ of debt, with, by implication, the force of an earthquake) first used for pre-democratic debt cancellation associated with Solon in the sixth century bc (Androtion F 40, *Ath. Pol.* 6.1–2, Rhodes 1993: 125–30 (128 on the term σεισάχθεια). On the night of 25 January 2015 when the left coalition ΣΥΡΙΖΑ won a startling general election victory over Greece’s establishment parties, the Acropolis rang with the

words of the Canadian singer Leonard Cohen: ‘They sentenced me to twenty years of boredom / for trying to change the system from within’, but the music cut out before the punchline ‘first we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin’ (A.E. Stallings, *Times Literary Supplement* 5839 (27 February 2015), 16). Anglophone ancient historians stand by to teach Athenians their own lessons: D. Pritchard, ‘Balancing the Greek budget: the ancient Athenian perspective’, *Kathimerini* English edition, 5 March 2015.

- 16 The English national curriculum for Citizenship (to age 16) was drastically changed in 2014. The previous curriculum, in place since 2007, had been notably liberal in tone, emphasising that citizenship ‘equips young people . . . to take an interest . . . to take part in decision-making . . . [to] play an active role . . . to engage critically . . . to argue a case . . .’ (‘The National Curriculum 2007’, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, ‘The importance of citizenship’; <http://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/about-citizenship/citizenship-curriculum/secondary-curriculum>). The new curriculum defines the subject in terms which suggest that government expects citizens to observe, understand and comply rather than to participate: ‘A high quality citizenship education helps to provide pupils with knowledge, skills and understanding to prepare them to play a full and active part in society. In particular, citizenship education should foster pupils’ keen awareness of how the United Kingdom is governed and how its laws are made and upheld. It should also prepare pupils to take their place in society as responsible citizens by providing them with the skills and knowledge to manage their money well and make sound financial decisions’ (‘The National Curriculum in England’, Department for Education Framework Document, July 2013, p. 185). Participation, if any, is expected to take the form of volunteering, as opposed to voting or standing for office (‘Pupils should be taught . . . the different ways in which a citizen can contribute to the improvement of his or her community, to include the opportunity to participate actively in community volunteering’, pp. 186–7).
- 17 Ober 2008: 197 f. points to the significance of the location of Martin Luther King’s speech as evidence that great public monuments serve a purpose not only at times when the community as a whole wishes to come together, but also in periods of civic strife resulting eventually in social realignment. This effect was reiterated, and perhaps redoubled, at the dedication of the memorial park for Martin Luther King in Washington, DC in October 2011, where President Barack Obama’s speech connected King’s struggle for civil rights with the American people’s struggle to overcome the current economic crisis (see e.g. Miranda S. Spivack’s report on the *Washington Post* website, 16 October 2011: www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/specialreports/MLKmemorial).
- 18 Though in rare cases such as that of the wealthy banker Pasion, former slaves could become very powerful indeed: see Shipton 1997, esp. 409–21.
- 19 For discussion of ‘democracies’ real, theoretical and imaginary, ancient and modern, see the essays in Ober and Hedrick (eds) (1996); on the contexts and forms in which ancient Greek democracy emerged, see the essays in Raafaub, Ober and Wallace (eds) (2007), and the materials presented in Robinson 2004.
- 20 I use the term ‘elite’ while recognising problems in applying it to democratic Athens. It does not correspond to a self-identifying group in the ancient city; some Athenians identified themselves, for instance, as καλοὶ καγαθοί ‘fine and good’ (or ‘gentlemen’, a term implying social and cultural superiority), but there was neither a consensus as to who belonged to this group nor a clear criterion for membership. The Aristotelian *Athenaion Politeia* (discussed further below) regularly distinguishes between ‘notables’ (γνώριμοι) on the one hand and the

demos on the other, but again it is not consistently clear where the line is drawn: see Rhodes 1993: 88 f. Ober 1989: 11–17 examines ancient historians' use of 'elite', 'ruling elite', and sub-categories defined by wealth, birth, status, education, etc.; Ober's own work demonstrates that the flexibility or even instability of the term need not undermine its usefulness. Similarly Osborne 2009: 210: 'elite . . . is simply shorthand for those who secured the dominant position in society, however they achieved that position . . . the beauty of the term lies in the absence of association with any particular set of qualities (birth, wealth, athletic success) other than that of being recognised to be "on top".' When I refer to an elite I have in mind particularly the advantages of wealth and access to wealth. 'Access to wealth' introduces a status element: for example, Socrates as portrayed by Xenophon and Plato has very little personal wealth but has a status which puts him on terms of friendship with some of the richest citizens and thus makes him, to this extent, a member of the elite. While 'elite' thus conceived in terms of wealth approximates to a Marxist propertied class, I have not used the term 'class' because, with Ober, I am not convinced that the exercise of power within the Athenian democratic system is best understood directly in class terms, in spite of the indubitable importance of underlying class struggle; see, however, the rather one-sided but often well-directed critique of Ober in Rose 2006: 106–10, and the powerful case for class analysis of Athenian democracy presented in Rose 2012 (*passim*, but esp. 317–63). The lines of argument are familiar; Rose accuses Ober of accepting, with 'all too American' naivety ([sic], 2006: 107), a complete separation of economic and political spheres; Rose in turn is open to the charge of reductivism in failing to acknowledge that these spheres, for all their inseparable connection, are not identical in their dynamics.

- 21 Recent scholarship has raised questions about how firm and universal in practice were the polarities and hierarchies articulated by Athenian democratic ideology – slave/free, male/female, citizen/non-citizen, Greek/non-Greek. The moments of blurring or fluidity which are the focus of such scholarship do not, however, diminish the darkness of the picture as a whole, any more than numerous instances of resistance, rebellion, solidarity and human compassion diminish the horror of the transatlantic slave trade and its aftermath. See Bernard Williams' chapter 'Necessary Identities' (Williams 1993: 103–29) for a stimulating and influential discussion of ancient Greek thought about the status of women and slaves; p. 125, where Williams argues that slavery in ancient Greece is not, in reality, so far removed from some forms of oppression which are widespread in the modern world (for a brief critique of Williams' account, see Fisher 1995: 72 f.). For a lucid survey of modern responses to ancient Greek ideas of liberty, see Vlassopoulos 2010: 40–75, and for discussion of the challenge which the institution of slavery in ancient Greek and Roman society has posed for modern historians and the different ways in which they have responded to this challenge, see McKeown 2007.
- 22 Similarly Ober 2008: 29 on his project of understanding 'how and why Athens performed as well as it did'.
- 23 Herodotus 5.92. Cf. Euripides *Suppliants* 442–9.
- 24 Herodotus 3.80: [τύραννος] φθονέει . . . τοῖσι ἀρίστοις περισσοῦσι τε καὶ ζώουσι, χαίρει δὲ τοῖσι κακίοις τῶν ἀστών, διαβολὰς δ' ἄριστος ἐνδέκεσθαι... πλῆθος δ' ἄρχον πρῶτα μὲν οὐνομα πάντων κάλλιστον ἔχει, ἰσονομίην, δεύτερα δὲ τούτων τῶν ὁ μούναρχος ποιέει οὐδέν· πάλω μὲν ἀρχὰς ἄρχει, ὑπεύθυνον δ' ἀρχὴν ἔχει, βουλευμάτα δὲ πάντα ἐς τὸ κοινὸν ἀναφέρει. ('[A tyrant] resents the very survival and existence of the best people

in the city, and delights instead in the worst of them; he is an expert in listening to slanderous accusations . . . The rule of the majority, on the other hand, has, in the first place, the fairest name of all: equality at law; second, it does none of what the sole ruler does. It assigns public offices by lot, and provides accountability in public office, and refers all issues to collective decision-making.'

- 25 Thucydides 1.70: οἱ μὲν γε νεωτεροποιοὶ καὶ ἐπινοῆσαι ὄξεῖς καὶ ἐπιτελέσαι ἔργῳ ἃ ἂν γινῶσιν . . . ἔτι δὲ τοῖς μὲν σώμασιν ἀλλοτριωτάτοις ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως χρώνται, τῇ δὲ γνώμῃ οἰκειοτάτῃ ἐς τὸ πράσσειν τι ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς ('They [i.e. the Athenians] are innovators; they are quick to form new ideas and to put anything they may think of into practice . . . also they put their own bodies into service on behalf of the city as if they were someone else's property, whereas they use their intelligence to accomplish the city's goals as if it were on their own account.')
- 26 On the interpretation of 2.40.2 αὐτοὶ ἦτοι κρίνομεν γε ('we ourselves are sure judges') see Hornblower 1991 *ad loc.* and Gray 2011: 20 f.
- 27 Thucydides II.40–41.
- 28 Discussions of this debate are numerous. See in particular the incisive and contrasting treatments by Ober 1998: 94–104, Hesk 2000: 248–58, Barker 2009: 240–48. Barker argues (to summarise a subtle argument rather crudely) that we as readers of Thucydides are meant to *see through* Kleon's rhetorically dangerous warning against the dangers of rhetoric: 'Thucydides does more than demonstrate the dangers of political rhetoric; his text *performs* the danger of that rhetoric – and the danger too of succumbing to it' (2009: 246).
- 29 Thucydides 3.37.4.
- 30 3.38.4: εἰώθατε θεαταὶ μὲν τῶν λόγων γίγνεσθαι, ἀκροαταὶ δὲ τῶν ἔργων.
- 31 See Dowden and Livingstone 2011, Bremmer 2011.
- 32 'So *the omniscient Muses are goddesses of total recall* . . . The master narrator of the *Iliad* . . . [i]nspired by the omniscient Muses . . . becomes an omniscient narrator' (Nagy 2007: 56, original emphasis). Birth of the Muses: Hesiod, *Theogony* 53–61 and 915–17.
- 33 On the Seder, see Assmann 1992: 15–18.
- 34 Cf. Thuc. 1.22.1, Arist. *Poetics* 1451a36–1451b11.
- 35 First published 1893; collected in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*: www.gutenberg.org/8/3/834/.
- 36 For a stimulating discussion of the reflections of Plato and other thinkers, from antiquity through to modernity, on writing as a memory-medium, see A. Assmann 1999: 179–217. A classic structuralist analysis of the role of forgetfulness (*lēthē*) and its *other* opposite besides memory, namely truth (*alētheia*, etymologically 'unforgetfulness'), in the development of Greek thought, is provided by Detienne 1996: 107–34.
- 37 See Murray and Wilson 2004.
- 38 The assumption that the development of the individual mirrors the development of the race or species strikingly anticipates strands in nineteenth-century evolutionary theory: see Gera 2003: 75 f.; on the limits within which such ideas may be applicable to language acquisition, see Aitchison 1996.
- 39 See Gera 2003: 95–7. Simpson 2007 examines the fascinating story of the French 'wild boy' Victor de l'Aveyron and his 'keeper'/'educator' Jean Itard.
- 40 On the Muses and *mousikē*, see the essays in P. Murray and P. Wilson 2004, and

especially P. Murray 2004 on the different ways in which the Muses presided over poetry, rhetorical eloquence and philosophy.

- 41 See Most 2006 for a sobering if slightly dyspeptic critique of this Thucydidean soundbite and its scholarly reception.
- 42 'A city teaches a man' (πόλις ἄνδρα διδάσκει), in the words of the sixth/fifth-century bc poet Simonides of Keos (F 90).
- 43 ἐξ ἀρχῆς καθ' Ὅμηρον ἐπεὶ μεμαθήκασι πάντες . . . (21 B 10 DK); see further e.g. Irwin 2005: 1 f.
- 44 On the role of heroic myth in general and of the Homeric epics in particular in the – to a significant and surprising extent elective – formation of 'Greek' identity, see e.g. Finkelberg 2005: 161–76.
- 45 On the ending of the *Odyssey* see e.g. Wender 1978, R.B. Rutherford 1986: 161 f.; on Odysseus' encounter with his father Laertes in particular; R.B. Rutherford 1996: 81; Silk 2004: 43 ('necessary [but] . . . less than satisfying', n. 33).
- 46 On the relationship between rulers (often referred to as *basileis*, kings) and people (*laos*) in the *Iliad*, and in particular on the significance of the common formulaic expression ποιμένα/ποιμένι λαῶν 'shepherd of the people' referring to the former, see Haubold 2000, with the qualifications expressed in Thalmann 2001; on the social order of the *Odyssey*, Thalmann 1998, with the critique of some of Thalmann's premises and conclusions provided by Postlethwaite 2001. For a brief and approachable overview of the question what society or societies are represented in the Homeric epics, see Osborne 2004.
- 47 In the Greek a single word, the form of address δαίμονιε (*daimoniē*, masculine; feminine *daimoniē*), much discussed (see Dickey 1996: 141 f.), but in Homer perhaps indicating (sometimes jokingly, sometimes in earnest) that the addressee's behaviour is so unexpected that it can only be understood as having been caused by the (unfathomable, but frequently malicious) intervention of a supernatural entity, a *daimōn*.
- 48 μύθων τε ῥητῆρ' ἔμνεαι πρηκτῆρρά τε ἔργων, *Iliad* 9.443. On debate in the epics, see especially E. Barker 2009: 31–136. Barker argues that verbal conflict and dissent is integral to the society of the *Iliad*, whereas in the *Odyssey* debate is shown to be dysfunctional, and is ultimately marginalised by the authority of the individual hero (though, in Barker's view, the effect is not to eliminate opposing voices but rather to make the audience aware that 'the contest is loaded': p. 39 n. 30). It is tempting to regard the ending of the *Odyssey*, this epic which, in Barker's account, tends to close the door on dissident voices, as deliberately open and ambiguous (as opposed to, say, the result of editorial inadequacies or insufficiently skilled merging of different versions); such a reading bears the stamp of modern critical fashions rather than ancient ones, but need not be discounted for that reason.
- 49 Seaford 2004: 23–67, E. Barker 2009: 31–134 and Rose 2012: 93–165 offer contrasting but (to a surprising extent) complementary historical perspectives on the Homeric epics.
- 50 Hertel 2011: 430–33 (also presenting the case for identifying Achilles as the original protagonist of the story, in the place of the person we might expect, namely the husband of the stolen bride, Menelaos).
- 51 On the grim appropriateness of the 'death feast' which Odysseus serves to the suitors, see J.S. Clay 1994; p. 26, specifically on the fittingness of Antinoös' impalement through the throat as he reaches for another drink of wine. Cf. the insight of R.B. Rutherford (1986: 159) that, just as Odysseus is godlike in his

propensity to test people incognito, so too his vengeance is godlike, in other words, unrestrained and to mortal eyes excessive. Antinoös' punishment fits his crime in more than one way, not only his violation of guest-friendship but also his greed (cf. 17.473) and his offensively suave confidence in the unassailability of the suitors' position: he is first introduced mocking Telemachos over the possibility – or, in the suitors' eyes, impossibility – that the young man may one day inherit his father's kingdom. Ancient scholars' annotations (scholia) to the *Odyssey* identify the incident of Antinoös' death, on the authority of the Hellenistic grammarian Dionysios Thrax, as the origin of the proverb 'it's a long way from the cup to the tip of the lip' (Σ in *Od.* 22.9-12: πολλά μετὰ ζῦ πέλει κύλικος καὶ χεῖλος ἄκρου), cf. the English proverb 'there's many a slip twixt cup and lip.' Antinoös' contemptuous treatment of Odysseus in his beggar's disguise at 17.415–88 fixes him as the test case for the question whether recklessly abusive behaviour, *hybris*, shall or shall not be followed by heaven-sent retribution.

- 52 22.446–73. The attention of the poem's audience is expressly drawn to the unsettling fact that Odysseus' son Telemachos, to whom his father assigns this task, particularly desires for the maid-servants an 'unclean' (462) and 'most painful' (472) death, and the scene culminates in the chillingly memorable picture of their slow hanging at line 473: 'their feet twitched as they struggled for life, for a short while only – not very long at all' (ἤσπαιρον δὲ πόδεσσι μίνυνθά περ, οὐ τι μάλα δῆν).
- 53 *Odyssey* 11.119–37.
- 54 In the 'Catalogue of Ships' in Book 2, the poet explicitly asserts the impossibility of naming the 'multitude' of the Greeks who went to Troy: the πλῆθος, an epic/Ionic form of πλῆθος, in later use a near-synonym of δῆμος. 'As for the many, I could not tell or name them, / not if I had ten tongues, and ten mouths too, / a voice unbreakable, and a heart of bronze within me, / unless the Olympian Muses, Zeus of the aegis' / daughters, were to remind me all those who went to Ilion' (2.488–92). This rhetorical *praeteritio* (raising a possible theme only in order to reject it) is slightly paradoxical in context, since the poet has already enlisted the Muses' help in 2.484–7 in order to name the commanders of the Greek force; it is not made clear why they can help with the smaller task but not with the rejected larger one. See Heiden 2008: 128–34 for the intriguing, though not entirely convincing, suggestion that this *praeteritio* of a listing of the common soldiers serves precisely to emphasise their importance by subverting the traditional epic economy of *kleos*, fame from deeds named in song: the arbitrariness of actual *kleos*, he suggests, calls attention to unrealised, because unspoken, potential *kleos*. (Heiden (130 f.) softens the paradox identified above by neglecting the significant ambiguity inherent in the words μνησαίαθ' ὅσοι ὑπὸ Τάϊον ἦλθον in 2.492: indirect question 'remind [me] *how many* went to Troy', as in Heiden's paraphrase 'the Muses might put the poet in mind of the total numbers', or object noun clause (= τούτων ὅσοι) 'remind [me] of *all those who* went to Troy', thus positing a scenario in which the ordinary soldiers' individuality is preserved.)
- 55 ὀλέκοντο δὲ λαοί: as a result of the divinely sent plague, and thus, of course, marking a dysfunctional situation which needs to be resolved, but nonetheless setting the tone for the poem. Cf. πῦρ τε δὲ λαός 'and the people were falling' at 8.67, 11.85, 15.319 and 16.778. At 1.117, Agamemnon, reluctantly agreeing to release the girl Khryseis, says 'I prefer the people (*laos*) to be saved rather than destroyed', but the preference is not enough to make him step back from the brink of his ensuing quarrel with Achilles. An interesting contrasting note is

struck by the words of Sarpedon, one of the commanders of the Trojans' Lykian allies, reproaching Hektor at 5.472–7: 'Hektor, where has it gone, the fighting spirit you had before? / Do you expect to hold your city without your people and your allies (ἄτερ λαῶν . . . ἢδ' ἐπικούρων) / on your own, along with your brothers-in-law and your brothers? / As for them, I cannot see or pick out a single one of them now; / no, they are crouching in hiding, like wolves afraid of a lion; / but we are doing the fighting, we who are here as your allies . . .'. The passage is echoed in Haimon's angry words to his father Kreon in Sophokles' *Antigone*: 'you would make a good ruler of a desert land, all on your own' (739).

- 56 See e.g. R.B. Rutherford 1986 (cf. p. 150: 'in spite of . . . boastful passages . . . it remains the case that Odysseus does tell us a fair amount, sometimes ruefully and grimly, about his own errors as well as his companions' misdeeds').
- 57 A good example of an exception which serves to demonstrate the validity of the rule is provided by the poignantly memorable character of Odysseus' companion Elpenor. 'A very young man, not very / steadfast in fighting or particularly sound in his wits', Elpenor survives being turned into a pig by Kirke only to die after falling drunkenly from a ladder in her palace (10.552–60; 552 f. quoted). When Odysseus visits the underworld in Book 11, Elpenor's shade, manifesting itself at the trench of sacrificial blood to request funeral honours for his corpse (which are duly granted by Odysseus in Book 12, lines 8–15), is the butt of the hero's gentle but grim humour, tempered with tears: 'Elpenor,' he asks, 'how did you come to the dingy land of darkness? / You got here faster on foot than I did in my dark ship!', 11.57 f.). Elpenor's effective self-erasure from the economy of the poem (it is worth noting that his marker (*sēma*) and symbol after death is to be the oar with which he rowed – he is in essence a companion, an oarsman, rather than a substantive character in his own right) is all the more ironic in view of the fact that he has an (apparently) significant name which would seem to suggest greater prospects for him: *Elp-ēnōr* in Greek (cf. the verb ἐλπ-ομαι 'hope, expect', the noun ἀνὴρ 'man', and the Homeric abstract noun ἡνορίη 'manliness') suggests 'hope of men' or 'hope for manliness'. Elpenor, though, is no one (and everyone); his hope is empty; he is, in effect, an epitaph waiting to happen (as in Callimachus 46, a simple but powerful funerary epigram for a son who represents the loss of his father's 'great hope', πολλὰ λὴν ἐλπίδα: cf. Livingstone and Nisbet 2010: 88 f.).
- 58 On Hesiod as teller of myth, see Dowden 2011; on his place in the development of Greek thought, J.S. Clay 2003.
- 59 '[T]he splitting of Eris . . . points to the unity of Hesiod's *oeuvre*' (J.S. Clay 2003: 8). The rhetorical move of creating 'strife within strife' by verbally refracting the deified concept/personified deity itself into an antithesis represents the poet's/poetry's didactic authority over the discourse of myth itself: Livingstone 2011: 129–31.
- 60 See J.S. Clay 2003: 100–128.
- 61 Arkhilokhos F 114: οὐ φιλέω μέγαν στρατηγὸν οὐδὲ διαπεπλεγμένον/ οὐδὲ βοστρύχοις γαῦρον οὐδ' ὑπεξυρημένον,/ ἀλλὰ μοι σμικρὸς τις εἴη καὶ περὶ κνήμας ἰδεῖν/ ροικός, ἀσφαλέως βεβηκὼς ποσσὶ, καρδίας πλέως.
- 62 It also underpins, and is developed in, the social practice of *kalos*-inscription (in which variations on the formula 'X *kalos*', 'X (is) beautiful' are written on fragments of pottery or other objects). X is usually but not always male, and often but not always a named individual (*ho pais kalos*, 'the boy (is) beautiful', is also common). See further, Lissarrague 1999. Limited evidence prevents us from

fully understanding the social significance of this practice, but there are signs that it developed into a game in which male fellow-drinkers amused and teased each other with competitive *kalos*-inscriptions in the context of the symposium (see e.g. A. Steiner 2002); in democratic Athens, it may also have played a part, like the social codes of the modern dinner-party, in exploring and redefining who belonged in the (traditionally aristocratic) context of the symposium, and thus in defining who was entitled to be described as *kalos*.

- 63 See Hariman 1995.
- 64 The *pankration* (παγκράτιον) was a form of unarmed combat in which, according to the Roman-period writer Philostratos, all methods were allowed except biting and gouging (*Imagines* 2.6.3). Pindar's *Nemeans* 2, 3 and 5 and *Isthmians* 4, 6, 7 and 8 celebrate victors in the *pankration*, a place for 'the strength of an enduring heart' (*Nemean* 2 14 f.). An alarming description of athletes practising the *pankration* is provided in the second-century ad Syrian Greek writer Lucian of Samosata's dialogue *Anacharsis, or On Gymnasia*, 1-4.
- 65 ἀλλ' εἰκῇ μάλ' αὖτο νομίζεται: an alternative translation would be 'but this custom is followed very much at random': it is not clear whether it is the practice itself or the reasoning behind it that is being characterised as unsystematic.
- 66 I.e., in the Olympic games.
- 67 οὐ γὰρ ταῦτα πιαίνει μυχοὺς πόλεως: more literally, 'this is not what fattens the corners/recesses of the city'.
- 68 Plutarch *Solon* 8.1-2; Diogenes Laertius 1.47; Solon F 1-3.
- 69 Irwin 2005: 134-42 argues persuasively that this felt cap (πιλίδιον) connects Solon with multiple facets of the mythological *persona* of Odysseus: canny military commander, world-wise traveller, and disguised figure whose self-revelation heralds a change of fortune in the world around him.
- 70 Plutarch, *Solon* 8.1-2: ἐσκήψατο μὲν ἔκστασιν τῶν λογισμῶν, καὶ λόγος εἰς τὴν πόλιν ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας διεδόθη παρακινήτικῶς ἔχειν αὐτόν. ἔλεγεῖα δὲ κρύφα συνθεῖς καὶ μελετήσας ὥστε λέγειν ἀπὸ στόματος, ἐξεπλήρησεν εἰς τὴν ἀγορὰν ἄφρων, πιλίδιον περιθέμενος. ὄχλου δὲ πολλοῦ συνδραμόντος ἀναβάς ἐπὶ τὸν τοῦ κήρυκος λίθον ἐν ᾧ δὴ διεξήλθε τὴν ἐλεγείαν ἣς ἐστὶν ἀρχή· αὐτὸς κήρυξ ἦλθον ἀφ' ἡμερτῆς Σαλαμῖνος, κόσμον ἐπέων ᾧδὴν ἀντ' ἀγορῆς θέμενος. τοῦτο τὸ ποίημα Σαλαμῖς ἐπιγέγραπται καὶ στίχων ἑκατόν ἐστι, χαριέντως πάνυ πεποιημένον.
- 71 F 2: εἶην δὴ τότε· ἐγὼ Φολεγάνδριος ἢ Σικινίτης/ ἀντὶ γ' Ἀθηναίου πατρίδ' ἀμειψάμενος/ αἶψα γὰρ ἂν φάτις ἦδε μετ' ἀνθρώποισι γένοιτο/ Ἀττικὸς οὗτος ἀνὴρ τῶν Σαλαμιναφετέων.
- 72 Irwin 2005: 132-46; see also Irwin 2006: 40 on Plutarch's Solon as 'transgressive' elegist.
- 73 'Odysseus casting aside his rags and revealing himself' (*Odyssey* 22.1: 'But Odysseus of many wiles stripped himself of his rags . . .') was still a powerful role to adopt for purposes of intellectual and rhetorical self-revelation many centuries later: for an intriguing discussion of its rhetorical deployment by another star of Greek persuasive speech, the first-century ad orator Dion of Prousa, see Whitmarsh 1998. On Solon's political self-positioning, see further Wallace 2007.
- 74 Note again Solon's usurpation and adaptation of an Odyssean *persona*: the citizens of Athens are identified with Odysseus' doomed companions – and thereby exhorted to prove that they are no such thing: in effect, to remember

and deploy the characteristics which have ensured, and will continue to ensure, their own survival.

- 75 The text and interpretation of this line have been much discussed. The main transmitted text, τρύχεται ἐν συνόδοις τοῖς ἀδικοῦσι φίλοις, could perhaps be translated ‘is worn down in gatherings by friends who do wrong’, but the sense seems strained: what title do these people who do wrong and wear the city down have to be called ‘friends’? My translation is based on West’s text τοῖς ἀδικοῦσι φίλους, following a correction in one of the manuscripts; the sense is clearer, but the construction is still rather strained. Bergk suggested συνόδοις τοῖς ἀδικοῦσι φίλαις, ‘gatherings which are welcomed by wrongdoers’. The idea that the construction is deliberately ambiguous, in order to underline the sympotic commonplace that – in general, and especially in times of civic conflict – it is worryingly hard to be sure who one’s ‘friends’ really are, is attractive, but not, in my view, entirely convincing; in ancient public performance, or even in private recital (by contrast with modern scholarly discussion), the danger of hearers simply being confused would surely outweigh the hope that some might recognise the clever trope. See further Irwin 2005: 96 n. 17, with references to earlier discussions.
- 76 As for example in Elizabeth Irwin’s excellent study of Solon’s politics of exhortation: see the *index locorum*, Irwin 2005: 348 f.; see also J.D. Lewis 2006: 80–89, 96 f., 104 f.
- 77 On the structure, development and themes of this elegy as a whole, see Lattimore 1947, A.W. Allen 1949; more recent discussions have tended to focus on selected portions. In line 76, the ambiguity in my English translation ‘one man gets it, then another’ is intended to reflect ambiguity in the Greek ἄλλοτε ἄλλος ἔχει, literally ‘at different times a different [man] has’: the object of *ekhei* ‘has’ is probably *atē* ‘ruin’ (ruin attends one person after another), but could be *kerdea* ‘gain’ (ill-gotten wealth passes from one person to another); see Lattimore 1947: 178.

2 Citizen spaces

Phaedrus: How strange you are, Socrates, and how very hard it seems to be to pin you down. There's no question about it, what you're saying makes you seem like a stranger on holiday and not a native at all. The way you don't leave the city, not even for the outskirts! – and as for going outside the walls, I really don't think you do it at all.

Socrates: You must forgive me, Phaedrus. What I love is learning. Landscapes and trees won't teach me anything – people in the city will.¹

Plato *Phaedrus* 230de

Knowing where it happens

I want to look a little more broadly at the role of the Speaker. Often, we tend to think of the Speaker in relation only to the Chamber, but the Speaker's role is of much wider importance... The House will forgive me for quoting myself, but in the course of my life I have developed five little democratic questions. If one meets a powerful person – Adolf Hitler, Joe Stalin or Bill Gates – ask them five questions: “What power have you got? Where did you get it from? In whose interests do you exercise it? To whom are you accountable? And how can we get rid of you?” If you cannot get rid of the people who govern you, you do not live in a democratic system.

Tony Benn MP (Labour, Chesterfield), speaking in a UK House of Commons debate on procedures for election of the Speaker of the House, 22 March 2001

Il semble que certaines réalités transcendantes émettent autour d'elles des rayons auxquelles la foule est sensible. C'est ainsi que, par exemple, quand un événement se produit, quand à la frontière une armée est en danger, ou battue, ou victorieuse, les nouvelles assez obscures qu'on reçoit et d'où l'homme cultivé ne sait pas tirer grand-chose, excitent dans la foule une émotion qui le surprend et dans laquelle, une fois que les experts l'ont mis au courant de la véritable situation militaire, il reconnaît la perception par le peuple de cette «aura» qui entoure les grands événements et qui peut être visible à des centaines de kilomètres. On apprend la victoire, ou après coup quand la guerre est finie, ou tout de suite par la joie du concierge . . .

It seems that certain transcendent realities send out a halo of light which is perceptible to the masses. So it is, for example, that when an event takes place – when an army at the border is in peril, or defeated, or victorious, and an educated person can make little of the confused reports that are coming in, those same reports have an emotional effect on the masses which take him by surprise. It is only when he has heard expert briefings on the real military situation that he recognises this as the people's perception of that 'aura' which surrounds great events and which can sometimes be seen hundreds of kilometres away. We learn

about the victory either long afterwards, when the war is over – or right away, because our concierge is overjoyed

Marcel Proust, *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*

The quotations above, from an English socialist politician speaking at the beginning of the present century and from a French novelist and theorist of the psychology of memory writing early in the previous one, shed light on two important themes. First, the importance for a democracy of a clear understanding of how and by whom political power is held, how political decisions are made and on whose authority, and perhaps most importantly, of how power can be removed from those who have acquired too much of it or who fail to exercise it well. Second, there is the equally important but perhaps less obvious question of how the information on which effective political decision making relies is disseminated through the community. The vital channels by which news and political intelligence travel are, of course, inevitable targets of control for whatever elite groups exist or emerge within a society, but, as Proust impressionistically suggests and as many studies have shown, such control is never complete and may often be subverted in unexpected ways (thus feeding anxieties among the elite themselves). Tony Benn's comments on the importance of the role of Speaker in the British House of Commons are deeply rooted in particular controversies of the day, not intended as a general pronouncement about the British constitution or about democratic governance. But when he points to the Speaker's critical importance as someone who represents democratic authority precisely because he speaks for the democratic institutions themselves while not 'speaking' from a specific political standpoint within them, it has significant connections with the political rhetoric of Solon's elegies. In this chapter of the book, I explore democratic Athens as a network of spaces, variously formal and informal, official and unofficial, in which knowledge and the power knowledge brings with it were shared or traded among citizens (and others).

Recent developments in the modern world provide very interesting analogies and points of comparison. Both the exercise of power and the dissemination of the knowledge on which it depends become simultaneously more remote and impersonal and more local and individualised, as the entrenched power of global markets, global media and international elite networks compete with the viral dynamism of social networking, instant electronic communication and street activism and uprising. The fundamental questions remain the same.

Solon, whom we have encountered as the stage-setter for participatory citizen performance, has an enduring presence as the legendary founder-figure for Athenian democracy many centuries after his death. He represents a period of momentous cultural change in the Greek world, and for us, as for Athenians of the fourth century bc, he stands – rather as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* do – on the threshold between the world of myth and the world we live in, ‘this world’, between prehistory or proto-history and a historical record with which we can engage in dialogue, tentatively but with at least some degree of well-founded hope that we are making progress towards a deeper understanding. Appropriately, he stands close to the beginning of the (accidentally, but in a sense also appropriately in view of the conjectural and obscure status of the events it described) mutilated beginning of our manuscript of the first continuous ancient account of the emergence and development of democracy and citizenship in Athens, the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians*.²

On the one hand, Solon is more real and visible to us than either his antecedent the legendary eye-for-an-eye lawgiver Drakon (active, if real, c. 620 bc) or later figures such as the equally legendary pioneer of drama Thespis (active, again if real, c. 540–30 bc). Already at the beginnings of our historical record their names belong as much to an idea as to a person, a fact reflected by their survival in the English words ‘draconian’ and ‘thespian’ and corresponding adjectives in other modern languages. On the other, he is less fully implicated in what we can access as real ‘history’ than, on the one hand, his relative the autocratic ruler (Greek *tyrannos*) Peisistratos (c. 610/600–527 bc), whose family’s seizure of power and development as an incipient dynasty acted, paradoxically, both as an obstacle and as a catalyst for the development of Athenian citizenship in directions which would lead to democracy; or, on the other, reforming politicians such as Kleisthenes (active 530s–500s bc) and Ephialtes, the latter assassinated in 462–1 bc shortly after his controversial reforms of the exclusive Areopagos council which were seen later as having paved the way for the fully fledged ‘Periclean’ democracy.³

Solon’s legendary and heroic function as a real enough, but not *too* real founder-figure for democracy is threefold. Ethically, he is the advocate of moderation: *mēden agan*, ‘nothing too much’, as the adage inscribed on Apollo’s temple at Delphi puts it. He represents, however, a model of individual self-restraint which is geared not towards individual asceticism or private virtue, but towards accommodation with the needs of others within the social group: collective integrity, not the integrity of the individual. In particular, he represents avoidance of the *koros*, bloated greed and excess, that leads to *hybris*,

the reckless mistreatment of others and disregard for their autonomy which is the worst enemy of any form of communal harmony. From this proceeds his political role as the advocate of inclusivity, compromise and, in particular, of the acceptance by the relatively poor of a degree of social inequality as the price of freedom, and by the relatively rich of the freedom of the poor as a reasonable and morally appropriate price for their own security and social privileges.⁴

Solon provides a striking range of metaphors to capture the role of the apparatus of law and state in protecting us at the same time collectively from our enemies and individually from each other (and, indeed, from our own worst selves). From this in turn proceeds his characteristic contribution in terms of political style. Solonian leadership is fundamentally a matter of compromise, *not* of the authority of the powerful individual; thus Solon takes the political stage in order to demonstrate its availability before vacating it in favour of others. He is there, essentially, to usher on the other actors and also to impress on them the fact that actors is precisely what they are: they are there to play their roles on cue, but then to make way, at the right moment, for whoever it is whose time has come to take the limelight in their place – while leaving open the possibility that they may themselves return imminently to the stage. The hallmark of this political style is an individual pre-eminence which is uncompromising in itself but which draws strength from being by its very nature temporary and conditional. The corresponding politics is a politics which puts to populist effect an aristocratic ethos, familiar for example from Pindar's odes for victorious athletes, in which celebration of the eternal glory of the victor is entirely compatible with – even inseparable from⁵ – recognition of the temporal and therefore temporary nature of the victory itself.

The democratic moment as modelled by Solon, and as we shall see it in other texts which celebrate the values of democracy, is not so much when a particular speaker occupies the platform in the Assembly and gives leadership or advice as the moment before the speeches begin when the crier or herald (*kēryx*) asks 'who wishes to address the meeting?'⁶ – the moment at which no one is, in fact, taking a lead, but where anyone may, in principle, do so.

The style of setting, and then vacating, a political stage which came to be associated with Solon is nicely illustrated in one of the most celebrated stories told in Herodotus' *Histories*:

... there came to [the court of Kroisos in] Sardis at the height of its wealth many intellectuals (*sophistai*) from Greece ... including Solon, an Athenian, who, after

making laws for the Athenians at their behest, went abroad for ten years . . . so that he could not be forced to change any of the laws he had laid down. The Athenians themselves could not do this, because they had sworn solemn oaths that for ten years they would abide by whatever laws Solon laid down for them. (1.29; cf. *Athenaiōn Politeia* 11.1, Plutarch *Solon* 25.6)

The story underlines the delicate balance between consent, cooperation and coercion in democratic politics. Individuals need to be able take the lead, but also to relinquish their leading role; the people collectively consent to have rules made for them, but are liable – and entitled, though not necessarily well advised – to insist the next moment that those rules be changed. The will of the majority creates and then surrenders a rule which governs all; it does so willingly but reluctantly, enduringly but not permanently: the rule itself must enshrine recognition of its own contingent and provisional nature, and thus remain permanently subject to renegotiation.

Solon constantly refigures antagonism as tension: polarity is made to define a continuum, generating not a gap or an inevitable conflict but a shared common middle ground between the opposing factions or positions, a space (*khōra*) in which anyone may seize the moment or opportunity (*kairos*).⁷ This middle ground, the space for political agency, appears as a function of the symbiotic tension between poet and audience and between individual leadership and collective decision as well as between the different interest groups which constitute the *polis*. Most importantly, the polarity which is made to appear not merely as a conflict or gap, but as an inevitable tension⁸ which manifests itself as a space for political action is that between rich and poor. This is, not suprisingly, a recurrent theme of the elegies, as in F 5, quoted in the *Athenaiōn Politeia* (12.1) as the first of a series of examples of Solon's own commentary on his role as an arbitrator between opposing sides:

I gave to the demos as much privilege (*geras*)⁹ as
is sufficient,

neither subtracting from their honour (*timē*),
nor reaching out for more;

as for those who had power and were admired
for their wealth,

I took care that they too should get nothing
that is unworthy:

no, I stood holding a mighty shield over both

sides,

and allowed neither to triumph wrongly over
the others.

Simple as they appear at first, the interpretation of these lines has been the subject of much debate. *Geras* (a word which can denote social privilege in general, or, in its narrower sense, the gift of honour granted by the army-community to an individual warrior in recognition of his achievements in battle) and *timē* (honour, or value, a concept which encompasses both the social standing of a person and the price of a commodity) are central to the *Iliad*. They are what is at stake in the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon in Book 1 which forms the theme of the poem and which eventually leads, beyond that, to the end of the Trojan War and to the end of the heroic age of myth itself. In declaring that he is ‘giving *geras* to the *dēmos*’ while at the same time reconciling the *dēmos* with the powerful,¹⁰ Solon identifies his dispensation for the Athenians both as a successor to the heroic society of epic, and, in contradistinction with it, as a place where *geras* is held in common and distributed according to principles of justice, not the preserve of the few or to be granted – or taken away – at the arbitrary whim of a king. But what exactly is the role or position in these lines of the giver of *geras* who replaces the king, ‘Solon’, the first-person narrator?

Two words in the poem in particular have attracted much discussion. First, in line 2, the participle *eporexamenos*, which I have translated as ‘reaching out for more’ could be taken either as meaning essentially the same as the previous participle *aphelōn* ‘subtracting’, i.e. reaching out to take more honours away from them (so Rhodes 1993: 172, following Lloyd-Jones) or, alternatively, as being in opposition to it, ‘reaching out for more (on their behalf)’.¹¹ It depends on whether the speaker is to be identified with the *dēmos* or with the rich and powerful. Surely, though, he must be identified with neither – and with both; with the unity that both recognises and transcends division. To put it another way, in spite of the authoritative use of first-person speech, there is a sense in which the giver, now that he has given the gift, must become symbolically absent from the scene, just as the lawgiver must make himself physically absent after enacting his laws.

Second, in line 5 I have translated the Greek word *amphoteroisi* (basically ‘to both’, but suggesting two groups rather than two individuals) as ‘over both sides’, thus interpreting the position adopted by Solon here as that of a transcendent figure who offers defence to

rich and poor alike. It can also be understood as ‘*against* both (sides)’, placing him instead as an embattled figure caught between both sides and resisting both factions as they clamour for greater power (i.e. rather like the lawgiver, before his departure, standing firm against pressure to change his laws).¹² The lines’ ability to conjure both these images is integral to their rhetorical effectiveness and versatility. The shield that defends the citizens individually or in groups from encroachment on their rights by their fellow-citizens is *also* the shield that defends them collectively as a united *polis*: the city can be united precisely because it understands and recognises itself as an entity composed of friend and enemy, *ekhthroi* and *philoï*, living together not in idealised harmony but in shared citizenship. The person holding the shield is inseparable from the shield itself; the lawgiver disappears and becomes the law. And the voice of Solon’s elegies, like the voice of the law itself, becomes an authoritative yet impersonal voice of instruction in democracy and in citizenship itself for all the citizens of Athens.¹³ It is a voice available to all, as the voice of any and all citizens, within the terms of the democratic settlement. Returning to the scene from Euripides’ *Suppliants* discussed earlier, it is the voice which answers the challenge ‘Who has some good advice, and will bring it forward for the city to share?’¹⁴

Democratic citizenship: Staging and rehearsal

How, in practice, did Athenians learn what was expected of them as citizens and acquire the skills and information necessary to perform their roles? Participatory democracy was collectively scripted, cast, rehearsed and performed not on a single stage but throughout a network of interconnected performance spaces. The stage metaphor is only partly a metaphor; some of these ‘stages’ were stages, and Athenians understood and represented their politics in theatrical terms: in terms of plot and narrative, script and improvisation, acting, spectacle and audience response. The audience might be the internal audience of fellow-citizens and thus fellow-actors, an external audience from neighbour and rival communities, as well as – perhaps most important of all – the boundary-breaking audience of the internal other, those members of the city’s population who were excluded from some or all of its political institutions: women of every level of social status, and men of slave, metic or other non-citizen status.

What did citizens learn?

The culture of learning in Athens was manifold and diverse. What has since antiquity been bracketed off as ‘education’ was only a tiny part of it, a part whose prominence in traditional accounts reflects the experience of the leisured elite who were able to devote themselves to it most fully.¹⁵ The majority of citizens did not have the luxury of owning sufficient property and slave labour to support themselves and their dependents in idleness; it was therefore necessary for them to learn an occupation. This, then, was in an existential sense the most crucial part of their education. There were the skills associated with farming and extracting raw materials, the manufacturing professions despised by those of higher status as menial (*banausoî*), and the service and cultural trades supplying the needs and desires of the citizen population. This practical learning was, with some notable exceptions, not highly valued in the texts which have formed the foundation of our view of the history of ancient Greek education. In general, those texts were written by or adopted the perspective of a property-owning elite in whose eyes productive work was menial, ‘banausic’.¹⁶

The process of learning and preparation in the skills, knowledge and techniques required in order to follow a trade, craft or profession has not been a major focus of historical accounts of ancient education in general.¹⁷ These have often been moulded by a seductive and ideologically loaded schema which is widespread in ancient Greek texts from the fourth century bc onwards: a schema which begins by distinguishing ‘body’ (*sōma*) from ‘soul’, from *psykhē*, and ascribing to each its distinctive mode of cultivation: physical exercise and training for the body, mental and spiritual cultivation for the soul.¹⁸

Practical learning cuts uncomfortably across this distinction; it often involves development of capacities which extend, in graduations which experts themselves may find hard to specify, across the spectrum of physical and mental. Becoming adept at farming, making clothes, mining or shipbuilding involves (for example): developing occupation-specific physical muscle strength and stamina; acquiring the knack of manipulating the tools and instruments for the job, plus corresponding hand-eye or other coordination; amassing specialist knowledge such as properties of raw materials (types of soil, fabric, rock, timber), principles of their management and use, and patterns/formulae for performing tasks and solving problems (ploughing, irrigation, tailoring fabric for strength and fit, securing shafts and removing ore, shaping and fitting timber), all of which may be

internalised without being articulated in any fixed verbal form; and then also, perhaps, acquiring theoretical knowledge and the meta-discourse required in order to reflect on, compare and modify practice and pursue innovation.

In the defence speech imagined for him by Plato, ‘Socrates’ makes skilled manual workers (*kheirotekhnai*, ‘hand-crafters’) the final port of call on his quest for someone with genuine knowledge:

I knew that they, at least, were people in whom I would find plenty of valuable knowledge. And I wasn’t wrong on that score; they knew a great deal that I did not, and in that sense were more expert [or ‘wiser’, *sophōteroi*] than me. But I concluded, Athenians, that these talented professionals¹⁹ suffered the same failing as the poets and other talented professionals: because they could practise their own trade well, each of them considered himself to be an absolute expert (*sophōtatos*) on all the other most important subjects as well; and this mistake overshadowed the expertise they genuinely had.²⁰

This verdict leads Socrates to reflect on his own condition and to conclude that he is perhaps better off as he is, not being wise/ expert (*sophos*) but at least not being ignorant of his own ignorance.²¹ It is also an effective metaphor for treatment of practical skills in Plato’s dialogues themselves; they attract interest as candidate examples of ‘knowledge’, but because this ‘knowledge’ is not accompanied by (and more importantly based on) knowledge of ‘the most important subjects’ (the basis of knowledge itself), they fail the test and therefore lapse into obscurity.²² Analogies with occupations, trades and professions (*tekhnē*, pl. *tekhnai*) are constantly invoked by Socrates in Plato’s dialogues.²³ While this *tekhnē* analogy serves various argumentative purposes, its distinctive function is to provide familiar, common-sense illustrations of the principle that there is an unbreakable link between doing something well and possessing knowledge and understanding: a principle which is then, of course, subjected to various forms of intense philosophical scrutiny and challenge.²⁴ If a shoemaker (*skutotomos*) is a good shoemaker, it is by possessing the art of shoemaking, (*tekhnē*) *skutotomikē*, and this art involves not only practice but also a body of specialist knowledge. Questioning of the claims of *tekhnē* serves as a step in the variously articulated argument that virtue is attainable, if at all, through the practice of philosophy. The range of *tekhnai* discussed or mentioned in Plato’s dialogues is intriguing. It encompasses work and leisure, women’s work and men’s work, the lives of both rich and poor. Many of the terms are probably invented by Plato.²⁵ A representative (but not exhaustive) list includes:

- farming (γεωργική) and related techniques including pastoral

husbandry (ἀγελαιοτροφική/ ἀγελαιοκομική), shepherding flocks (ποιμενική), driving oxen (βοηλατική), viticulture (ἀμπελουργική), felling timber (δρυσοτομία/ δρυσοτομική) and bark-stripping (φλοῖστική);²⁶

- productive activities such as leather-work and shoemaking (δερματοουργική/ σκυτική/ σκυτοτομική), carding wool (ξαντική), spinning (νηστική/ ταλασία/ ταλασιουργία/ ταλασιουργική), weaving (ὑφαντική), house-building (οικοδομική), metalwork (χαλκεία), pottery (κεραμεία), carpentry (τεκτονική), lyre-making (λυροποιική), painting (γραφική) and making statues (ἀδριαντοποιία);²⁷
- services such as butchery and cookery (μαγειρική, ὀψοποιία/ ὀψοποιική), bath-house-keeping (βαλανευτική), laundering (γναφευτική), beauty-care (κομμωτική, κοσμητική), midwifery (μαιευτική) and medicine (ιατρική), plus the anti-services of theft (κλεπτική) and parasitical flattery (κολακευτική);²⁸
- *mousikē* and poetry (μουσική, ποιητική), and the skills of poetic and musical performance (ῥαψωδική, ἀύλητική, κιθαριστική, κιθαρωδική), plus the art of training choruses (χοροδιδασκαλική);²⁹
- physical exercise (γυμναστική), and various athletic and leisure activities including chariot-racing (ἡνιοχική), fighting the *pankration* (παγκρατιαστική), boxing (πυκτική), and playing board games (πεττευτική), as well as horse-riding (ἵππική), hunting (κυνηγετική, θηρευτική), fishing (ἀλιευτική, ἄσπαλιευτική) and fowling (ὀρνιθευτική);³⁰
- the governmental arts of kingship (βασιλική), citizenship (πολιτική), law-making (νομοθετική) and judging (δικανική, δικαστική); the commercial occupations of trading and shopkeeping (ἐμπορική, καπηλική); the arts of steering a ship (κυβερνητική), archery (τοξική), fighting wars (πολεμική), commanding an army (στρατηγική), and of prophecy and divining (μαντική, οἰωνιστική);³¹
- the arts of persuasion and disputation, ‘rhetoric’, ‘sophistic’, ‘eristic’, and ‘antilogic’ (ῥητορική, σοφιστική, ἐριστική, ἀντιλογική), the mathematical arts of arithmetic, calculation, and geometry (ἀριθμητική, λογιστική, γεωμετρική), and the all-important (for Plato) philosophic method of dialectic (διαλεκτική).³²

The deployment of *tekhnai* in Plato's dialogues makes powerful use of the contradictory views of their practitioners simultaneously entertained among the Athenian elite: on the one hand, as untrustworthy hirelings; on the other, as guardians of an uncontested form of expertise which had a definite social value. Socrates repeatedly challenges the assumption fundamental to democratic ideology that the *dēmos* are fit to govern the city, and the belief current among elite Athenians of Socrates' and of Plato's generation that there are forms of instruction (offered e.g. by 'sophists') which will make individual citizens better at governing the city. Both of these propositions are encapsulated in Plato's terms in the problem of *politikē*: the art, technique or profession of being a citizen and running a city. Socrates uses the *tekhnai* as a familiar common-sense model of subject-specific knowledge. When pressed to identify equivalent specialist knowledge which qualifies people for citizen engagement in politics (*politeuesthai*), his interlocutors struggle and are forced, sooner or later, to characterise citizen knowledge in terms of moral values, judgements of right and wrong, appealing for example to the quality of *dikaiousunē* (rectitude, morality, justice), the attempt to understand which is the starting-point and declared goal of the inquiry dramatised in Plato's *Republic*. Plato's characters then find themselves drawn ineluctably to the conclusion that, since not all are equally virtuous, not all are equally equipped to engage in politics (Protagoras of Abdera in the dialogue *Protagoras* is allowed to resist this conclusion more effectively than most). This in turn leads to the conclusion that it would be rational to place politics and the government of the city not in the hands of all, but in the hands of 'the best people'.

The desire of the elite and aspiring elite to distance themselves from the untidy continuum of practical learning is part of the reason that ancient discussions of education focus on military prowess, and on military prowess conceived as general physical fitness on the one hand twinned with the generic spiritual quality of courage, *andreia*, on the other – rather than in terms of the specific skills, qualities and training that make someone a good rower, say, or a good sword-fighter. In Xenophon's *Household Management*, for instance, Socrates draws on the example of Sparta, with its highly specialised military elite, to posit a direct opposition between technical skill and fighting quality: 'in some cities, and especially in those regarded as successful in war, no citizen is even allowed to work in productive trades (βαναυσικάς τέχνας ἐργάζεσθαι, 4.3.6).'

Plato makes the *tekhnē* analogy cut both ways. Political decisions are like shoes: it takes an expert to make them well. On the other

hand, political decisions are *not* like shoes: the expertise required to make them is not discrete and limited, but involves knowledge not only of the city and all its circumstances, but also of the moral foundations of decision making itself and thus of ultimate philosophical truth. By using the analogy at all, however, the philosopher concedes an important point about citizen learning in Athens. Athens is, obviously, a city of varied expertise, expertise which is variously owned and put to practical use by the whole assortment of its inhabitants, citizen and non-citizen. It is particularly interesting to note the wide range of expertise in the city, including expertise traditionally associated with both women and men, both rich and poor, which is drawn together in the web of *tekhnē* discourse in his dialogues, as illustrated in the list of terms above. Awareness and understanding in general terms of expertise which they do not themselves possess is manipulated by Socrates and his interlocutors themselves to form building-blocks of philosophical argument. The accumulated and dispersed expertise of the city is similarly available for adaptation and reuse as the building-material of democratic knowledge. ³³ Plato, who advocates vocational commitment of our time to the pursuit of a master-discourse, *philosophia*, which will lead us ever closer to the ultimate true knowledge presupposed and yet not supplied by any particular expertise, is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the poet-figure of Solon's prayer to Zeus (F 13) discussed above, whose vision of the city's success rests on the small gains snatched from time to time, in the moment, by individual expertise.

Learning at home

'Tell us, Nikeratos, what sort of knowledge are you proud of?'

'My father, who made it his business to ensure that I would be a fine man, made me learn every line of Homer; and at this moment I could recite the entire *Iliad* or *Odyssey*.'

(Xenophon, *Symposium* 3.5)

Education in Greek is *paideia*: the word is derived from *pais*, *paid* – 'child' – and its etymology could be taken to suggest a startlingly modern conception of education as an inherently 'child-centred' activity. This would be a mistake; in the thought-world of ancient Greece, *paideia* might more accurately be understood as the 'processing' children require in order to develop or transform them into (adult) human beings.³⁴ The education prescribed for Nikeratos

by his father, the aristocratic general Nikias, is slightly eccentric, and its implications are humorously explored in the ensuing discussion.³⁵ It is however a reminder of the role a father might be expected to have in directing a son's education, the aspect of the father-son relationship which is comically explored in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. In the evidence of our sources, though, what is striking about father-son education is its rarity. It is prominent above all as an absent standard against which really-existing society is measured and found wanting: fathers set poor examples, sons fail to respect them, and, above all, professional teachers – 'sophists', represented in *Clouds* by the caricatured figure of Socrates – are threatening because they lure sons away from their fathers' control.

Since this charge presupposes the obvious father-son instructional paradigm, it is all the more remarkable that literature down to the classical period mostly presents scenarios in which this paradigm is broken. In the *Iliad*, the father-son relationship is systematically undermined. This is perhaps unsurprising in the Poem of War *par excellence*: parents have no joy of their children, their investment in child-rearing goes unpaid; fathers bury their sons. Mothers in particular see their hopes of their children dashed (Thetis, Hecuba). Daughters are abducted and raped; Khryseïs, reunited with her father after abduction, is not only the catalyst for the events of the poem, but is an exception demonstrating a rule. The only father-son relationship which is *performed* in the poem is that of Hektor and Astyanax, an encounter almost unbearably laden with premonition of death, and a foreshadowing of the climax of the poem in Book 24 with Priam's reunion with his son – after the latter's death. From this point of view, the poem's pregnant ending – with the funeral rites of Hektor, the dead son – is entirely appropriate to its content. Even 'father' Zeus weeps unavailing tears for his son Sarpedon – tears no less unavailing than those of the mortal Niobe, whose grief for her children is invoked by Achilles as exemplar for his encounter with his enemy's father Priam in Book 24. Achilles himself weeps because Priam reminds him of his own father, Peleus, whom he will never see again; but in practice, as we have learned earlier in the epic, the young Achilles was raised and taught not so much by his father as by the fugitive stranger Phoinix (9.442–3) and by the Centaur Kheiron (11.832). The *Odyssey* focuses from the beginning on a son whose father's absence has arrested his progress to adulthood. This is why Telemakhos needs instruction from Pallas Athene in the guise of Mentès. Telemakhos is agnostic as to whether Odysseus is really his father (*Odyssey* 1.215 f.), and thanks Mentès for giving him advice 'like father to son' (1.308). Hesiod's *Works and Days* has affinities with traditions of wisdom- and

advice-literature in the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Asia, in which father-to-son advice is common; but Hesiod's advice is directed not to a son but a brother, and to a brother who has conspicuously failed to learn the essential lessons of honesty and industry. Models of son or daughter learning from mother or father are relatively scarce (perhaps in part because myth is rich in stories catalysed by the breaking of this parent-child bond). Theognis of Megara's proverbial poetic wisdom is addressed to Kynos, a male love-object, and through him to an aristocratic homosocial peer group.³⁶ Texts from democratic Athens tend to confirm the picture that while teachers may sometimes be *in loco parentis*, parents themselves are not the paradigmatic teachers. The most striking depiction of a father-son relationship in an educational context is that of Strepsiades and his son Pheidippides in Aristophanes' comedy *Clouds*. Strepsiades has been unable to curb his son's extravagant spending, which he blames, strikingly, on the influence of the boy's aristocratic mother (41–55). His attempt to compensate for his own lack of authority by sending Pheidippides to learn at Socrates' thought-workshop (*phrontistḗrion*) backfires horribly, with the son learning that if his father can beat him for his own good, he can surely do the same to his father (1409–29). The play ends with vengeful destruction of the thought-workshop – but with little if any sense that some natural order of benign parental instruction has been restored.

Places of learning

In practice, sons of those wealthy enough to afford it were sent out for lessons in literacy with a teacher, perhaps in a school (*didaskalou*; 'teacher's house', *didaskaleion*).³⁷ The fortune of their daughters in this respect is harder to establish (sources comment less on girls' education, but as ever it is hard to know whether this reflect actual rarity or simply the preoccupations of the sources themselves).³⁸ Schools were a familiar feature of Greek towns at least by the fifth century;³⁹ there are certain to have been significant changes in patterns of schooling in Athens during the time of the democracy, but limitations of evidence make them impossible to trace with any confidence. The fact remains that learning was not in general localised in buildings and institutions, at least not until the rise to prominence in the course of the fourth century of specialist elite schools such as Plato's in the grove sacred to the hero Akadēmos (the Academy), Aristotle's in a colonnade (*peripatos*) in the precinct of Apollo Lykeios (the Peripatos or Lyceum), and Isocrates', which appears to have met in his own house, and which Cicero likened to the Trojan Horse, 'from

which none but leaders of men came forth'.⁴⁰ This chapter is primarily concerned with less formal, and less immediately recognisable, places of learning. It builds on the model of 'free spaces', borrowed from the American political historians Sara M. Evans and Harry C. Boyte, which Kostas Vlassopoulos has profitably deployed in studying space and identity in the democratic city.⁴¹ It emphasises the permeability and interconnectedness of the spaces within which both citizen learning and democratic political action were organised.⁴²

The agora

The agora was the democratic heart of Athens, perhaps more so than the institutional spaces of assembly, court or theatre.⁴³ This was perhaps in part precisely because it was a place of (unruly, if not necessarily free) public association before these institutions existed.⁴⁴ It was probably the original setting for the statue-group of the assassins Harmodios and Aristogeiton, posthumously idolised as the 'tyrannicides' and archetypal heroes of the *dēmos*; the ideological energy of this sculpture must, in that case, have been amplified by its location in what was from the point of view of ornamental architecture a relatively blank space between the conspicuous monuments of the Acropolis and of the Kerameikos respectively.⁴⁵ The atmosphere of 'anti-elite gossip and anti-tyrannical violence' in the agora made it the perfect stage for one of the democracy's most powerful symbols, the ritualised procedure of *ostrakophoria* which could result in a leading citizen being sent into exile by popular vote.⁴⁶ The agora was a public gathering-place, and hence a place of exchange: exchange of goods, words, news, ideas.⁴⁷ With the development of other specialised – and, progressively, purpose-built – venues for public business, the agora itself became increasingly specialised as a marketplace or shopping centre (though, as will be seen, it continued to serve multiple functions, no less than shopping centres in all parts of the world do today). It remained a place where all manner of business is transacted, where talking, dealing and networking go hand in hand. Thus the chorus of parasites or flatterers, professional hangers-on (*kolakes*), describe their 'daily work' in the agora in Eupolis' comedy *Kolakes* (*Flatterers* or *Scroungers*):

ἀλλὰ δίαιταν ἦν ἔχουσ' οἱ κόλακες πρὸς ὑμᾶς

λέξομεν. ἀλλ' ἀκούσαθ' ὥς ἐσμέν ἅπαντα
κομψοὶ

ἄνδρες, ὅτοισι πρῶτα μὲν παῖς ἀκόλουθός
ἐστιν

ἀλλότριος τὰ πολλὰ, μικρὸν δέ τι ἱκάμοντ'
αὐτοῦ.

ἱματίω δέ μοι δύ' ἐστὸν χαριέντε τούτῳ,
οἷν μεταλαμβάνων ἀεὶ θάτερον ἐξελαύνω
εἰς ἀγοράν. ἐκεῖ δ' ἐπειδὰν κατίδω τιν' ἄνδρα
ἡλίθιον, πλουτοῦντα δ', εὐθὺς περὶ τοῦτόν
εἰμι.

κἄν τι τύχῃ λέγων ὁ πλούταξ, πάνυ τοῦτ'
ἐπαινῶ,

καὶ καταπλήττομαι δοκῶν τοῖσι λόγοισι
χαίρειν.

εἴτ' ἐπὶ δεῖπνον ἐρχόμεσθ' ἄλλυδις ἄλλος
ἡμῶν

μᾶζαν ἐπ' ἀλλόφυλον, οὗ δεῖ χαριέντα πολλὰ
τὸν κόλακ' εὐθέως λέγειν, ἢ ἑκφέρεται
θύραζε.

οἷδα δ' Ἀκέστορ' αὐτὸ τὸν στιγματίαν
παθόντα·

σκῶμμα γὰρ εἶπ' ἀσελγές, εἴτ' αὐτὸν ὁ παῖς
θύραζε

ἐξαγαγὼν ἔχοντα κλῶν παρέδωκεν
Οἶνεϊ

Right. So what's the daily routine for us
flatterers? I'll

tell you. Listen and hear what thoroughly clever

people we are. We always have a slave-boy at
our side –

mostly someone else's, but part of him's ours
too!⁴⁸

Personally,⁴⁹ I've got two cloaks – these ones –
aren't they nice? –

and I wear them each in turn every day when I
go out

to the agora. When I get there and see

some man who's daft, but rich, I'm all over him
at once.

Whatever Rich Boy says, I'm full of praise for it –

I go mad in my show of loving his remarks.

Next? We go to dinner! Each to a different
house,

to 'alien corn'.⁵⁰ And there, it's charming
conversation – plenty of it –

a flatterer needs to have, or he's thrown out at
once.

That closet-slave Akestor, I know that's what
happened to him:

he made an insulting joke, and the slave dragged
him out

and sent him straight to Oineus, with a collar
around his neck. (F 172)⁵¹

The agora is a place where status, and identity itself, can be traded using the currency of wit and eloquence. The flatterer is the ultimate creature of the agora, the commoditisation of human worth personified, whose cleverness can buy substantive goods and services and yield otherwise quite unattainable social privilege.⁵² On the other hand, the stakes are the highest they can be: failure to play the part well, to recognise and live up to the demands of the social moment (*kairos*), may incur the ultimate price of public ignominy, execution and denial of burial. The gathering of flatterers which serves as the *mise-en-scène* for Eupolis' play is represented as taking place in the

house of Kallias: the very rich Athenian aristocrat who plays host to a convention of sophists in Plato's dialogue *Protagoras*. One possibility is that the chorus of flatterers in Eupolis' comedy is a travesty of the same intellectual circle later exposed to more serious scrutiny by Plato, mocking the pretensions of Kallias' celebrity hangers-on by bringing them down to street level. More probably, though, the flatterers in the comedy are simply flatterers, fellow-participants alongside Protagoras, Hippias and other distinguished foreign visitors in a general scramble for attention and patronage. The doors of the elite stand open if you know how to make your way in.

Like Solon, the flatterers mediate between egalitarian and hierarchical social orders. Despots too have flatterers, whose elevation to their patron's level may threaten to subvert the social order, but in the end this subversion serves only to set the gulf in status between them in relief; in Athens, the roles of flatterer and patron can blur, merge and even be exchanged.

Another resident expert who frequents the agora and shrewdly navigates the channels between public and private spheres is the cook.⁵³ Professional cooks rise to prominence in fourth-century comedy, supplanting the 'home cooking' of comic protagonists like Dikaiopolis in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and Peisetairos in *Birds*.⁵⁴ This may simply be a literary development, as the focus of comedy shifts from city to household and its interest in the detailed arrangements for events focused on the household – and on the staff involved in those events – correspondingly increases. Archaeological evidence, on the other hand, lends colour to the possibility that literary change here reflects social change, as larger houses in Athens acquired dedicated spaces for specialised culinary activity and thus the ability to accommodate specialised kitchen staff.⁵⁵ The core of this staff is the master-chef himself, the *mageiros*, assisted by a kitchen-manager or *maître d'hôtel*, the *trapezopoios* (literally 'table-maker') and perhaps by other functionaries such as a bread-maker, pastry cook or wine-pourer.⁵⁶ In comedy, the cook facilitates an ending marked by resolution of conflicts and misunderstandings, restoration of social order, and in particular a wedding, which needs to be marked by sacrifice and a feast: the last two require the appearance of the chef, live animal in tow. The boastful, loquacious, pretentious and unprincipled *mageiros* is generally the star turn, often with the *trapezopoios* as sidekick; the two model the roles of teacher and apprentice and enact a homely version of practical intelligence and cunning (*mētis*), as in a fragment of Dionysios' comedy called *Of the Same Name* or *Namesakes* (*Homōnymoi*, fourth century bc), F 3:

ἄγε δὴ Δρόμων νῦν, εἴ τι κομψὸν ἢ σοφὸν
ἢ γλαφυρὸν οἶσθα τῶν σεαυτοῦ πραγμάτων,
φανερὸν πόησον τοῦτο τῷ διδασκάλῳ.
νῦν τὴν ἀπόδειξιν τῆς τέχνης αἰτῶ σ' ἐγώ.
εἰς πολεμίαν ἄγω σε· θαρρῶν κατὰτρεχε.

5

ἀριθμῷ διδόασι τὰ κρέα καὶ τηροῦσί σε·
τακερὰ ποήσας ταῦτα καὶ ζέσας σφόδρα
τὸν ἀριθμὸν αὐτῶν, ὡς λέγω σοι, συγγέον.
ἰχθὺς ἄδρὸς πάρεστι· τάντος ἐστὶ σά.
κἂν τέμαχος ἐκκλίνης τι, καὶ τοῦτ' ἐστὶ σόν,

10

ἔως ἂν ἔνδον ὦμεν· ὅταν ἔξω δ', ἐμόν.
ἐξαιρέσεις καὶ τᾶλλα τὰκόλουθ' ὅσα
οὔτ' ἀριθμὸν οὔτ' ἔλεγχον ἐφ' ἑαυτῶν ἔχει,
περικόμματος δὲ τάξιν ἢ θέσιν φέρει,
εἰς αὖριον σε κάμει ταῦτ' εὐφρανάτω.

15

λαφυροπώλῃ παντάπασι μεταδίδου,
τὴν πάροδον ἴν' ἔχῃς τῶν θυρῶν εὐνουστέραν.
τί δεῖ λέγειν με πολλὰ πρὸς συνειδότα;
ἐμὸς εἰ μαθητής, σὸς δ' ἐγὼ διδάσκαλος.
μέμνησο τῶνδε καὶ βάδιζε δεῦρ' ἅμα.

20

Come over here, Dromon! If there's anything you
know

that's smart or clever or posh in your technique,
now is the time to show it to your teacher
(*didaskalos*).

I'm asking you to demonstrate your professional
skill (*tekhnē*).

I lead you into enemy territory: go for it, do your
worst!

5

They count out portions of meat and watch you
closely:

so, you make it really soft and simmer it right
down

the way I've told you, and there'll be no
counting it.

Here's a nice fresh fish. Needs gutting? That bit's
yours.

And if you cut a slice not quite right – that's
yours too!

10

(As long as we're indoors: when you come out,
it's mine.)

The trimmings and other stuff like that,
whatever

doesn't lend itself to counting or to checks
but comes in the class or category of 'mince' –
that's for you and me both to enjoy tomorrow.

15

The vulture-in-chief?⁵⁷ Yes, do give him a tip!

It'll make your to-and-froing through those doors
more . . . friendly.

I don't need to go on – you know just what I
mean!

You've learned it all from me: I've taught it all to
you.

Now, don't forget that, and meanwhile, come
here

20

The chef's speech casts the coming feast simultaneously as a military encounter, in which every defensive strategem (against theft) on the part of the host household is met with a counter-strategem, and as a kind of examination, in which the *trapezopoios*/student is required to demonstrate to the *mageiros*/teacher that he has thoroughly learned his craft (*tekhnē*). The 'demonstration' (*apodeixis*, line 4) demanded of the pupil is the counterpart of the 'instructive demonstration' (*epideixis*) by means of which an expert, like the chef, both displays and communicates his expertise.⁵⁸ What will count as success depends on a number of clearly identifiable separate skills, each of them here, in accordance with the comic context, to be performed badly or subversively: calculation (confounding it by making the items uncountable, 6–8); observation (spotting the hidden tidbits to be pinched, 9); skilled handiwork ('accidentally' careless slicing of the fish, 10); classification and correct application of a technical term (and thus knowing what counts as 'mince', 12–14); teamwork (with the chef, 11, 15), and tactical negotiation with the other side (the bribe for the overseer, 17). The *maître d'hôtel*'s success in completing his tasks and displaying the required skills seems to be anticipated at the end of the preserved part of the speech, where lines 18 f., more literally translated 'What need is there to say much to one who shares [my] knowledge? You are my pupil, and I am your teacher', has the effect of certifying his expertise and acknowledging him as a true successor to his master in his craft.

Food is central to comedy: to its literary ethos and to its social and cultural function.⁵⁹ Comic chefs, the philosophers of food, enact a celebration not only of low cunning but also, however thick the overlay of comic absurdity, of the real skills and knowledge, both

technical and practical, involved in a familiar occupation. Comedy often makes play of the abstruseness of their knowledge (as in the array of kitchen equipment listed by a cook at Anaxippos F 6, or the portentous instructions of a cookbook pored over for aphrodisiacs by the mythological character Phaon in Plato Comicus F 189), but theirs is an expertise of the everyday which remains accessible and tangible, not least because its products can literally be consumed.

The antitype of the cook's expertise in comedy is the pretended expertise of the philosopher or student of philosophy, as in the parody of philosophising in the style of the Eleatic school in Antiphanes F 120 (from *Kleophanes*, fourth century):

τόδε τυραννεῖν ἐστίν

ἢ τί ποτε; τὸν σπουδαῖον ἀκολουθεῖν ἐρεῖς

ἐν τῷ Λυκείῳ μετὰ σοφιστῶν νῆ Δία

λεπτῶν, ἀσίτων, συκίνων, λέγοντ' ὅτι

τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῦτ' οὐκ ἔστιν, εἴπερ γίγνεται,

οὐδ' ἔστι γάρ πω γιγνόμενον ὃ γίγνεται,

οὐτ' εἰ πρότερον ἦν ἔστιν ὃ γε νῦν γίγνεται,

ἔστιν γὰρ οὐκ ὄν οὐδέν· ὃ δὲ μὴ γέγονέ πω,

οὐκ ἔστ' ἕωσπερ γέγονε ὃ γε μὴ γέγονέ πω,

ἐκ τοῦ γὰρ εἶναι γέγονεν· εἰ δ' οὐκ ἦν ὅθεν,

πῶς ἐγένετ' ἐξ οὐκ ὄντος; οὐχ οἷόν τε γάρ.

εἰ δ' αὐτόθεν πῇ γέγονεν, οὐκ ἔσται· πόθεν

καὶ ποῖ γὰρ ἴσ' ἂν εἴη. πόθεν γενήσεται

οὐκ ὄν ποτ' εἰς ὄν; καὶ γὰρ οὐ δυνήσεται.

ταυτὶ δ' ὃ τι ἐστὶν οὐδ' ἂν Ἀπόλλων μάθοι.

Is this 'supreme power',

or something? Will you tell me that someone

worth his salt

will go along in the Lyceum with a lot of
sophists –

stick-thin half-starved creatures not worth a fig –
and say

that ‘this thing doesn’t exist, if it comes to be,

since while coming to be it isn’t yet what it
comes to be,

and if it was before it isn’t what it now comes to
be,

since there is nothing which is not; and what
hasn’t yet come to be

is not, until it has become it, what it has not yet
come to be,⁶⁰

because it has come to be from being: and if
what it came from wasn’t,

how did it come to be from what is not? It isn’t
possible.

And if it somehow came to be from nowhere, it
won’t exist: ‘from where’

and ‘to where’ would, you see, be equal.⁶¹ From
where will what is not

ever come to be into what is? It won’t be able
to!’

And what all this means not even Apollo could
understand.

The comic parody of the Eleatic demonstration of the impossibility of coming-to-be is closely reminiscent of the fifth/fourth-century sophist Gorgias of Leontinoi’s treatise *On What is Not*, a work which argues (with what degree of philosophical seriousness it is hard to tell) the impossibility of existence itself, of knowledge of existence and of communicating knowledge of existence.⁶² The bewildering repetitions

and grammatical variations characteristic of Eleatic argument are faithfully reproduced and caricatured, but the caricature also shows understanding of the substance of the arguments parodied, in particular the characteristic Eleatic concern that any transition from ‘being X’ to ‘being Y’ (and thus any change of state) would necessarily involve an impossible intermediary stage of ‘not being’ anything at all. The comic focus, though, is on the equivalence between physical and intellectual qualities: the sophist/ philosophers are personally and corporeally just as lacking in substance as their arguments – and thus exemplify the very state of not-being which they are arguing about.⁶³ Another vignette of philosophers at work, this time in Plato’s Academy, is offered by Epikrates F 10 (fourth century):

τί Πλάτων

καὶ Σπεύσιππος καὶ Μενέδημος;

πρὸς τίσι νυνὶ διατρίβουσιν;

ποία φρόντις, ποῖος δὲ λόγος

διερευνᾶται παρὰ τοῖσιν;

5

τάδε μοι πινυτῶς, εἴ τι κατειδῶς

ἦκεις, λέξον, <φίλε,> πρὸς Γᾶς.

(B) ἄλλ’ οἶδα λέγειν περὶ τῶνδε σαφῶς.

Παναθηναίοις γὰρ ἰδὼν ἀγέλην

<συλλεχθεισῶν τῶν> μειρακίων

10

ἐν γυμνασίοις Ἀκαδημείας

ἤκουσα λόγων ἀφάτων ἀτόπων.

περὶ γὰρ φύσεως ἀφοριζόμενοι

διεχώριζον ζώων τε βίον

δένδρων τε φύσιν λαχάνων τε γένη.

κᾶτ' ἐν τούτοις τὴν κολοκύντην
ἐξήταζον τίνος ἐστι γένους.

- (A) καὶ τί ποτ' ἄρ' ὠρίσαντο καὶ τίνος γένους
εἶναι τὸ φυτόν; δῆλωσον, εἰ κάτοισθ' τι.
(B) πρῶτιστα μὲν οὖν πάντες ἀναυδεῖς

20

τότ' ἐπέστησαν καὶ κύψαντες
χρόνον οὐκ ὀλίγον διεφρόντιζον.
κᾶτ' ἐξαίφνης, ἔτι κυπτόντων
καὶ ζητούντων τῶν μειρακίων
λάχανόν τις ἔφη στρογγύλον εἶναι,

25

ποίαν δ' ἄλλος, δένδρον δ' ἕτερος.
ταῦτα δ' ἀκούων ἰατρός τις
Σικελᾶς ἀπὸ γᾶς
κατέπαρδ' αὐτῶν ὡς ληρούντων.

- (A) ἢ που δεινῶς ὠργίσθησαν χλεύαζεσθαι δ'
ἐβόησαν;

30

τὸ γὰρ ἐν λέσχαις τοιαῖσδε τοιαῦτ' ἀπρεπὲς
ποιεῖν.
(B) οὐδ' ἐμέλησεν τοῖς μειρακίοις.
ὁ Πλάτων δὲ παρῶν καὶ μάλα πρῶως,
οὐδὲν ὀρυνθείς, ἐπέταξ' αὐτοῖς

ἀφορίζεσθαι τίνος ἐστὶ γένους.

οἱ δὲ διήρουν.⁶⁴

What about Plato

and Speusippos and Menedemos?

What subjects are they working on now?

What concerns, what type of argument

forms the object of their investigations?

5

If you have brought any sure information

tell me precisely, my friend, in the Earth's
name.

(B) I have knowledge to speak on that subject
with certainty.

It was the Panathenaia, you see, and I spotted

a herd of young men⁶⁵ gathered together

10

in the gymnasia at the Academy

and I heard arguments – ineffable,
extraordinary ones!

They were making Definitions of Nature

and they distinguished the Life of Animals

from the Nature of Trees and the Types of
Vegetables.

15

And then in this process they came to the
gourd

and starting examining which type it belonged
to.

- (A) And how did they define it, and to what type
did they assign the plant? Tell me, if you
know!

(B) Well, to begin with they were all silent

20

and then they stood there and bent over
and for a long time they were concentrating.
Then all of a sudden, while the young men
were still bent over, looking for answers,
someone said it was a Round Vegetable,

25

another a Grass, another a Tree.

And a doctor who heard this

from the land of Sicily⁶⁶

farted at them, for talking nonsense.

- (A) Surely they must have been fearfully angry
and protested at being made fun of!

30

In that sort of conversation such behaviour's
terribly rude.

(B) No, the young men didn't even notice.

But Plato was with them, and, very gently,

without the slightest agitation, told them

to start again on – the fart,

35

to define what Type it belongs to.

And they began making distinctions.

The studious young men are made ridiculous both by their concentration on the abstruse task⁶⁷ and by their undignified bent-over position, emphasised by repetition ('bent over . . . still bent over'), which draws attention to their behinds and thus invites a corresponding joke, as when Socrates' pupils are similarly bent over at *Clouds* 191–3:

Strepsiades: What are those people doing, the ones bent right over?

Student: They're investigating Erebos – down below Tartaros.

Strepsiades: So why is their anus looking towards heaven?

Student: It's learning to do astronomy all on its own.

Here the joke is provided more directly by the doctor's physical contribution of the fart, the implication being ('he farted at them *for talking nonsense*') that the fart itself is at least as articulate and meaningful as their discussion. The doctor comes from Sicily, internationally famous in antiquity as the home of luxurious cookery (as well as of noted medical schools),⁶⁸ and his contribution also draws attention non-verbally to what is, from a comic point of view, perhaps the most important deficiency of the students' deliberations: their failure to respond to the gourd as *food*. In polar opposition to the festive plenty over which cooks preside and which the words of the comic chef conjure before us, philosophical discourse turns insubstantiality into a fine art, starving Being itself out of existence, avoiding through endless distinctions any direct match between word and thing, and remaining resolutely impervious both to the presence of food itself and to the eloquent non-verbal commentary the doctor provides. It is the expertise of the agora, not of the philosophical schools, that literally puts food on the table.

The view beyond the city

Solon, Herodotus tells us (1.29), travelled abroad after he had given the Athenians his laws, in order to avoid being pressed to change them. Herodotus also tells us that Solon made the journey on the pretext, or ostensible motive, of *theōria* (*kata theōriēs prophasin* in Herodotus' Ionic dialect). Herodotus goes on to add that *theōria* was, indeed, a real motive for Solon in addition to his underlying political one. *Theōria*, 'travelling to see', is a term with no direct equivalent in English.⁶⁹ Sometimes, especially in later Greek, it does amount to English 'sightseeing', but more often it has additional connotations of intellectual seriousness and/or religious significance, as well as holiday spirit: a pilgrimage, or a journey of discovery.⁷⁰ In this case, Solon's journey as described by Herodotus is clearly a philosophical fact-finding mission of the kind appropriate to a sage; its destinations include not only Kroisos' court in Sardis but that of Amasis, in Egypt, a common (alleged) destination for Greek intellectuals, from the mythical Orpheus and legendary Pythagoras to historical figures such as Plato (and including, of course, Herodotus himself).⁷¹ *Theōria* could also mean simply attending a festival, or even the festival itself, and at this modest level it was accessible to all Athenian citizens; at Aristophanes' *Wasps* 1005 'dinners, symposia and *theōria*' are among the pleasurable experiences promised by Bdelykleon as part of his civilising programme for his uncouth father Philokleon.⁷²

The striking opening scene of Euripides' *Ion* has the chorus, a group of Athenian women, describe to each other (and thus to the audience) the sights they discover on arrival at the Temple of Apollo in Delphi. Their progressive recognition of artistic representations of familiar mythological scenes enacts an experience of foreign travel which will in turn be recognisable to members of the audience who have themselves been *theōroi*, to Delphi among other places. At the same time, it introduces the central ideological theme of the play: the rediscovery in a foreign land of the lost child who, unknown to all including himself, is the rightful heir to the throne of Athens and thus the guarantee – in the face of an interloping foreign ruler – of the citizens' all-important claim to autochthony: the status of aboriginal inhabitants of their city. *Theōria*, like drama, is frequently a journey via immersion in what we are not to a deeper and more nuanced understanding, or simply a clearer recognition, of what we are.⁷³

The agora, like the theatre, was a place where the city could find its own image in the wider world. It was where the city mirrored itself: a place for the nurture and cultivation of the physical self in food shops,

clothes shops, perfumers' and barbers', but also the focus of a wider network of spaces in which the many social groups constituting the city formed and interacted, and where identities were established – and could be put to the test. It was where Athenians sourced their pleasures, where private lives and public lives met; a seduction story like the one told by the speaker of Lysias I *On the Killing of Eratosthenes* begins appropriately with a strange man lying in wait outside a respectable house for the slave-girl whose job it is to go to the agora (8). The agora was also, together with the port of Piraeus, an index of the city's prosperity (or lack of it, in times of hardship), and of its place of privileged centrality in the commercial networks of the Mediterranean world.

The comic playwright Hermippos, known for attacking Aspasia and Pericles, composed a comedy called *Phormophoroi* (*Basket-bearers or Porters*) which was probably first performed in the early years of the Peloponnesian War.⁷⁴ In it a character, probably a representative of the chorus of stevedores or goods-bearers, sets out in grand style (and in epic hexameter verse) a catalogue of the myriad forms of produce which flowed into Athens from around the Mediterranean, in a list which mingles staples, luxury items and jokes:

ἔσπετε νῦν μοι, Μοῦσαι, Ὀλύμπια δώματ'
ἔχουσαι,

ἐξ οὗ ναυκληρεῖ Διόνυσος ἐπ' οἶνοπα πόντον,
ὅσ' ἀγαθ' ἀνθρώποις δεῦρ' ἤγαγε νηῖ μελαίνῃ.

ἐκ μὲν Κυρήνης καυλὸν καὶ δέρμα βόειον,

ἐκ δ' Ἑλλησπόντου σκόμβρους καὶ πάντα
ταρίχη,

ἐκ δ' αὖ Θετταλίας χόνδρον καὶ πλεῦρα
βόεια·

καὶ παρὰ Σιτάλκου ψώραν Λακεδαιμονίοισι,

καὶ παρὰ Περδίκκου ψεύδη ναυσὶν πάνυ
πολλαῖς.

αἱ δὲ Συράकुσαι σῦς καὶ τυρὸν παρέχουσι.

καὶ Κερκυραίους ὁ Ποσειδῶν ἐξολέσειε

ναυσὶν ἐπὶ γλαφυραῖς, ὅτι· δῖχα θυμὸν
ἔχουσι.

ταῦτα μὲν ἐντεῦθεν· ἐκ δ' Αἰγύπτου τὰ
κρεμαστά,

ιστία καὶ βίβλους, ἀπὸ δ' αὖ Συρίας
λιβανωτόν.

ἡ δὲ καλὴ Κρήτη κυπάριττον τοῖσι θεοῖσιν,

ἡ Λιβύη δ' ἐλέφαντα πολὺν παρέχει κατὰ
πρᾶσιν,

ἡ Ῥόδος ἀσταφίδας <τε> καὶ ἰσχάδας
ἡδυονεῖρους,

αὐτὰρ ἀπ' Εὐβοίας ἀπίους καὶ ἴφια μῆλα,

ἀνδράποδ' ἐκ Φρυγίας, ἀπὸ δ' Ἀρκαδίας
ἐπικούρους.

αἱ Παγασαὶ δούλους καὶ στιγματίας
παρέχουσι.

τὰς δὲ Διὸς βαλάνους καὶ ἀμύγδαλα
σιγαλόεντα

Παφλαγόνες παρέχουσι· τὰ γάρ <τ'>
ἀναθήματα δαιτός.

Σιδῶν δ' αὖ καρπὸν φοῖνικος καὶ σεμίδαλιν,

Καρχηδῶν δάπιδας καὶ ποικίλα
προσκεφάλαια

Attend me now, you Muses who dwell on
Olympos,

and tell, since Captain Dionysos has sailed the
wine-dark sea,

what goods for humans in his black ship he
brought hither.

From Kyrene: stalks of silphium and ox-hides.

From the Hellespont: mackerel; all sorts of dried fish.

From Thessaly: spelt-groats⁷⁵ and sides of beef.

And from Sitalkes of Thrace: a case of mange . . . for the Spartans.⁷⁶

And Syracuse supplies pigs and cheese.⁷⁷

But the Corfiots: may Poseidon wreck them
in their sleek ships, because their hearts are
divided.

So much for those places. From Egypt, stuff to
hang:

sails and cables. From Syria, now: incense!

From lovely Crete, cypress-wood for the gods,

while Libya supplies lots of ivory up for sale;

Rhodes: raisins and figs. The stuff of dreams!

But from Euboia, pears and sturdy apples;

captives from Phrygia; mercenaries from
Arkadia;

Thessalian Pagasai supplies slaves with tattoos.

Acorns of Zeus and sparkling almonds⁷⁸

Paphlagonia supplies; such are the trappings of
the feast.

Then there's Sidon: fruits of the date-palm, and
high-grade wheat;

Carthage: rugs and fancy pillows (F 63)

The opening line is borrowed from the start of the Iliadic Catalogue of Ships (*Iliad* 2.484). Where Agamemnon gathered ships to sail to Troy, Athens' mercantile hegemony is expressed in a gathering not of ships but – far more importantly – of their valuable contents. The role

ascribed to ‘Captain Dionysos’ (lit. ‘since Dionysos has been *nauklēros*’, a word meaning ship-owner or ship’s master) suits the standard Homeric phrase ‘wine-dark sea’ but seems likely to relate in particular to the festival of the City Dionysia as marking the start of the sailing season:⁷⁹ Dionysos opens the year, makes the sea navigable and thus brings the world’s cargoes to Athens, where the chorus of Hermippos’ comedy now dramatically gathers them in. The list parodies Homer but also exemplifies a more contemporary *topos*, praise or celebration of the economic amenities of Attica, found in political texts including Pericles’ funeral speech in Thucydides, the sarcastic late fifth-century lecture on the Athenian political system falsely attributed to Xenophon, and Xenophon’s own fourth-century economic treatise *Ways and Means* (Πόροι).⁸⁰ The porters’ mock-epic lecture on sea-trade and the Athenian economy illustrates comic drama’s characteristic fascination with the abundant diversity of the city of Athens and its ability to amass, assess and exploit resources from around the world; their geographic imagination conjures a democratic heroism of the agora, opposing wasteful epic expenditure of ships full of men to the city’s plenteous welcome of ships full of goods for its citizens (and of bad things for its enemies).⁸¹

In and out of the barber’s shop

In his comedy *Marikas*, first performed in 421 bc, Aristophanes’ rival Eupolis lampooned the prominent political leader Hyperbolos, who would a few years later be the last Athenian politician to be exiled by the procedure of ostracism.⁸² In Eupolis’ comedy, Hyperbolos was thinly disguised as the servile title-character ‘Marikas’, in very much the same way as Aristophanes had mocked the even more powerful Kleon as the ‘Paphlagonian’ of his comedy *Knights* three years earlier. The foreign name ‘Marikas’ echoes Aristophanes’ remaking of Kleon as a non-Greek Paphlagonian, and probably suggests something like ‘minion’, coming from a Persian word *marika*^h implying low status, youth and treacherous character.⁸³ The characters of Marikas and the Paphlagonian give shape to the emerging comic stereotype of the aggressively populist democratic politician or demagogue: inexperienced, rising from nowhere, thoroughly unprincipled, and relying on a toxic mixture of stupidity and cunning which somehow beguiles the people.⁸⁴ In F 194, Marikas reflects on his political education:

καὶ πόλλ’ ἔμαθον ἐν τοῖσι κουρείοις ἐγὼ

ἀτόπως καθίζων κούδὲ γιγνώσκειν δοκῶν.

I learned a great deal myself in the barbers'
shops,

sitting unnoticed, pretending not even to
understand.⁸⁵

Marikas confides in the audience one of the secrets of his success: his training has consisted in hearing, surreptitiously, the sum of what *everyone* can hear – the day-to-day gossip of the barbers' shops. ⁸⁶

Barbers' shops and other ordinary places of commerce and conversation are notoriously where news arrives first. Plutarch tells a vivid anecdote about how word first reached the Athenians of the disastrous fate of their forces in Sicily in 413 bc (*Life of Nicias* 30): a traveller arrived at the port of Piraeus and went for a haircut. At the barber's, he started chatting about what had happened, on the assumption that it was already common knowledge. The barber immediately rushed into town, ran into the magistrates in charge and caused panic when he 'threw the story into the agora' (*kat' agoran enebale ton logon*) – but when summoned to repeat the story in front of the Assembly, he was unable to name his source, and was thus promptly put to torture on suspicion of malicious rumour-mongering. The story illustrates the danger of spreading gossip but also its propensity to contain dangerous and unwelcome truths. Barbers' shops are also, as the fragment from *Marikas* illustrates, a place where people may unguardedly say (especially if they are unaware of an eager audience) what they might not say in a more formal setting.⁸⁷

In Aristophanes' *Birds* (lines 1440 f.) the comic hero Peisetairos describes what he presents as a typical scene of fathers gossiping about their sons' latest obsessions in the barbers' shops, and it may be significant that Peisetairos is talking to the character of the Informer, perhaps an indication that this was among the places such people might be expected to gather their information. Similarly in *Wealth* (line 338) it is from people in the barbers' shops that Blepsidemos has heard the news of the sudden wealth of his neighbour Khremylos. A fragment of the comic dramatist Plato's play *Sophists* mentions the 'barber's shop of Sporgilos' (a character also mentioned by Peisetairos at *Birds* 300) as a 'hateful place of shelter' (F 144). Naturally, different establishments attracted a different clientele – and were thus a useful place to track people down. For example, in a law-court speech from the second decade of the fourth century, the speaker describes the

action he took against an enemy who allegedly made a false claim to the citizen privileges historically held at Athens by refugees from the city of Plataiai:

When a long time passed and his criminal behaviour towards me didn't stop, I went to the tanner's shop where he was working and summoned him to the polemarch's court, because I thought he was a foreigner. When he said he was a Plataian I asked him what deme he was a member of. One of the people there suggested I summon him by his tribe as well, whichever one he claimed to belong to. When he replied that he was from Dekeleia, I summoned him again to the judges for Hippothontis, and I went and made inquiries at the barber's shop by the Herms, the one the Dekeleians go to, and asked every Dekeleian I could find if they knew any demesman from Dekeleia by the name of Pankleon; and no one could say that they knew him⁸⁸

The speaker treats it as common knowledge – or at least knowledge available to anyone who needs it – that there is a particular barber's shop familiar as the place to find people from the rural deme of Dekeleia. Similarly, when his next move is to make inquiries among the Plataian community, he learns from Plataian acquaintances that the place to go is the part of the agora dedicated to fresh cheese, where the Plataians gathered on the first day of each month. Shops are a reliable place to find people; they provide an index to the living who's who of the democratic city.⁸⁹

The shops frequented by someone can also be invoked as an index of their social standing, character and respectability. At Lysias 24 *For the Disabled Man* 20, the speaker practises a trade (*tekhnē*), which he is careful not to identify, in a shop near the agora. His accuser is allegedly trying to discredit him by saying that his business attracts the wrong sort of crowd to come and hang around there, wasters who have come to the end of their own money and now have an eye on other people's. The speaker chooses to interpret this charge as being based on the very fact that the people in question regularly spend time there – in effect, as an attack on his clientele simply for being a clientele. He is thus able to counter it by appealing to the judges with the claim that *everyone* in Athens is in the habit of frequenting some sort of shop – a perfumer's, a barber's, a shoemaker's or something – and especially those closest to the agora; so the accuser's attack is effectively an attack on every Athenian. By contrast, when the speaker of [Demosthenes] 25 *Against Aristogeiton* I sets out to characterise his opponent as utterly asocial and malignant, shunned by all and darting through the agora 'like a serpent or a scorpion', a clinching piece of evidence is that Aristogeiton does *not* frequent any of the barbers' shops, perfumers' shops or other such premises in the city.⁹⁰

The Athens-educated fourth-century historian Theopompus offers an

anecdote which suggests a not dissimilar social role for the barber's shop in another Greek metropolis, the Sicilian city of Syracuse: he reports (F 283b = Aelian *VH* 6.12) that the notorious tyrant of Syracuse Dionysios II, who in old age had partially lost his sight through excessive drinking, spent a lot of his time 'sitting in barbers' shops making jokes'.⁹¹ In the *Characters* of Theophrastos, sketches of personality types or social stereotypes compiled by another Athenian-educated writer of the later fourth century, we learn that the character who appears as no. 11, the 'lout' (βδελυρός), will stand outside a barber's or perfumer's shop, telling people of his intention to go and get drunk. Indeed Theophrastos, it was said, jokingly referred to barbers' shops as 'wineless symposia', because of the unrestrained talkativeness (*lalia*) of the people who sit in them.⁹² In Menander's comedy *Samia* (*The Woman from Samos*) 510, the irascible character Nikeratos tells his neighbour that, if *his* son had slept with his father's mistress, he'd have sold the mistress and renounced the son, so that every barber's shop and arcade (*stoa*) would be full from first light of people chattering and saying what a man he'd shown himself to be in avenging the atrocity. This comic scenario lends weight to the possibility suggested by *Birds* that the barber's may have been recognised as a distinctive networking place, for older men in particular.⁹³ By contrast, Xenophon characterises the young man Euthydemus as choosing to spend time in a saddler's shop *outside* (but close to) the agora on the grounds that he was not yet old enough to go into the agora itself.⁹⁴

The comic Marikas' confession about his barber's-shop education points to the latent power of the information shared in and around the agora. Two casual-seeming observations in the works of the fourth-century speech-writer and political publicist Isocrates add substance to this picture. In a speech relating to a court case of around 402/1 bc, the speaker, Isocrates' client, complains that he is being wrongfully pursued by his opponent in relation to an illegal seizure of money under the brief dictatorship of the 'Thirty Tyrants' in 404/3, an act in which he insists he had no part. The speaker contrasts his own reliance on the public evidence of witness testimony with the less creditable behaviour of his opponent Kallimachos: he 'accosts people in crowds and sits down in the shops and tells stories about what terrible treatment he's had from me and how I've deprived him of his money'.⁹⁵ This conduct is underhand because it does not follow the official channels, but it is dangerous at the same time because it is an effective way of communicating with the 'people' in general:⁹⁶ the 'crowd', *okhlos*, is the flip-side of the *dēmos*, its sinister *Doppelgänger* in the minds of all those who fear its power. Kallimachos activates the

In a much-quoted passage of his *Areopagiticus*, a written political manifesto of the 350s bc which is cast as a speech advocating a return to the (alleged) old-fashioned values of pristine democracy, Isocrates declares that the political system, *politeia*, is the ‘soul’ of a city (ἔστι γὰρ ψυχὴ πόλεως οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἢ πολιτεία, 14). This is what makes plans for the city, protects its assets and preserves it from danger. But now the city’s soul is sick and no one is doing anything about it: instead

... ‘we sit in the shops and inveigh against the way things are, saying that in all the days of democracy we’ve never been worse governed, while our actions and political attitudes show that we’re more content with the present system than with the one our ancestors handed down to us.

Isocrates’ rhetoric is effective: by saying that the citizens’ talk in the agora is just that – mere talk – while their public actions show their true feelings, he implies the opposite; they may go through the motions of accepting and condoning the present situation, but of course they know what they really think, and what they really think is reflected in what they say in the shops, in the marginal spaces between private and public. The true soul of the city is not the political system currently in force but the political system to which the citizens aspire. The rather unexpected move of enlisting the gossip of the shops in support of his argument prepares the way for a bold flourish of political myth-making, in which Isocrates invokes the supreme icons of democratic ideology: he calls for restoration of the democracy

... which Solon, who was the greatest democrat (*dēmotikōtatos*) of all, brought into law, and which Kleisthenes, who expelled the tyrants and brought home the *dēmos*, restored from its foundations: we could never find a system more democratic (*dēmotikōteron*) than that one or more advantageous to the city. (7 *Areopagiticus* 16–17)

Seen in one light, the talk of the shops is mere gossip, a shameful reflection of citizens’ idleness and apathy; seen in another, it is where the city’s true soul can be found, not wasted words but a sounding-board for the politics of the future (or rather, in Isocrates’ vision, for a renewal of the politics of the past).⁹⁸

Another intriguing reputed venue of shop-talk, this time philosophical, is the workshop of ‘Simon the shoemaker’. Simon is said in later sources to have been a favourite conversation-partner of Socrates, to have given his name to a dialogue by the Socratic Phaidon, and to have written Socratic dialogues himself. Excavation of

a building close to the Tholos in the Athenian agora (which was the meeting place of the *prutaneis*, the executive committee of the democratic Council) has found evidence of what may well have been a shoemaker's workshop, and the building has been tentatively identified on the basis of an inscribed cup base as the house and workplace of Simon himself.⁹⁹ In later philosophical tradition, Simon became an emblem of the down-to-earth philosopher uncorrupted by ambition, as in Diogenes Laertius' anecdote that he refused Pericles' offer of patronage because he would not sell his freedom to speak his own mind,¹⁰⁰ a hero of the stance that philosophers should adhere to the humble life and not pay court to rulers (as Plato and Aristotle did).¹⁰¹

These meeting places and sites of conversation and networking at the cusp of private and public may, as in the examples from Isocrates above, parallel or even usurp the function of law courts or assembly.¹⁰² Thus stories of information sharing, information foraging, formation of social cliques and networks, opportunities for conspiracy, information theft and public shaming, cluster around the agora and its shops, not only hairdressing establishments but smithies, shoe makers' workshops, fulleries, cooked-food shops and other establishments. Marikas' barber-shop education is a joke, but it is a joke rooted in real social spaces and social situations in which knowledge was disseminated, exchanged and organised among Athenian citizens.

Notes

- 1 ΦΑΙ. Σὺ δέ γε, ὦ θαυμάσιε, ἀτοπώτατός τις φαίνη. ἀτεχνῶς γάρ, ὃ λέγεις, ξεναγουμένῳ τινὶ καὶ οὐκ ἐπιχωρίῳ ἔοικας· οὕτως ἐκ τοῦ ἄστεος οὐτ' εἰς τὴν ὑπερορίαν ἀποδημεῖς, οὐτ' ἔξω τείχους ἔμοιγε δοκεῖς τὸ παράπαν ἐξίέναι. ΣΩ. Συγγίγνωσκέ μοι, ὦ ἄριστε. φιλομαθῆς γάρ εἰμι· τὰ μὲν οὖν χωρία καὶ τὰ δένδρα οὐδέν μ' ἐθέλει διδάσκειν, οἱ δ' ἐν τῷ ἄστει ἄνθρωποι. Just as Socrates' alleged wisdom consists in knowing that he does not know (*Apology* 21d), so here the ignorance of his surroundings which Phaedrus imputes to him is explained by his desire for knowledge (*philomathia*). In fact, of course, Plato's Socrates is represented as noticing things about both people and places (here, the altar of Boreas a little further down the Ilissos, *Phaedrus* 229b) which those more 'familiar' with them, like Phaedrus, do not.
- 2 The *Athenaiōn Politeia* (*Ath. Pol.*). *Politeia* (πολιτεία) is the abstract noun in Greek derived from the concrete noun *polis* ('citizen community', 'city-state', or 'city' for short). Thus a particular *politeia* is a 'citiness' – what makes a community what it is, its 'workings' or, to use the conventional translation, its constitution. (*Politeia*, Latinised as *Res publica* and rendered in English as *Republic*, i.e. 'system of government', is one of the transmitted titles of Plato's famous dialogue, the other being *peri dikaiosynēs* 'about justice' or 'about

morality'; in the modern Greek language, *politeia*, the quality of being a citizen, has come to mean 'culture'). The *Ath. Pol.* was probably composed over a period spanning the 330s–320s bc. There are two main reasons for calling it 'Aristotelian' as opposed to 'Aristotle's'. First, it is one of a huge collection (numbering perhaps around 150; ancient estimates go as high as 250; no others survive) of accounts of *politeiai*, forms of government, of Greek cities which we are told were produced by Aristotle's philosophical school but which must surely in large part, if not entirely, have been farmed out to his pupils rather than composed by the maestro himself – though of course it is quite imaginable that Aristotle might have wished to take responsibility himself for the account of Athens. Second, and more importantly, there are features of style, expression and thought which do not fully cohere with Aristotle's other surviving works, the *Politics* in particular. See the magisterial introduction and commentary of P.J. Rhodes (1993): 1 f. on ancient testimonia for the Aristotelian collection of *politeiai*, 51–7 on the date of *Ath. Pol.*, and 58–63 on its authorship.

- 3 *Ath. Pol.* 25. On the (unsolved and enigmatic) murder of Ephialtes, now a subject for modern detective fiction, see Roller 1989.
- 4 My focus here is on the 'legend' of Solon, poised (and I suggest, rhetorically self-positioned) between myth and history. For a more 'disenchanted' reading of Solon's rhetoric as class-struggle *Realpolitik* in defence of the aristocracy to which he belonged, see Rose 2012: 201–66; also 2012: 360, on 'the precedent of Solon': 'they ask for land, let them eat politics.'
- 5 Cf. *Olympian* 1 115 f. εἴη σέ τε τοῦτον ὕψου χρόνον πατεῖν,/ ἐμέ τε τοσσάδε νικαφόροις/ ὀμιλεῖν πρόφαντον σοφίᾳ καθ' Ἑλ-/λανας ἐόντα πάντα: 'may you be permitted to tread the heights while this time lasts,/ and I for as long a time to keep company with victors, remaining a byword for skill (*sophia*) among Greeks everywhere.' The lines simultaneously emphasise the symbiotic immortality through fame of poet and (in this case, Olympic) victor, the tension between this immortality and the personal mortality of each, and the parallel tension between immortal glory and ephemeral victory. It is a mistake to assume that Pindar's role as praise-singer to the aristocracy automatically makes him an ideological reactionary (Hornblower 2004: 78–86) or a 'paid lackey' (Pelliccia 2009: 246, cf. Rose 1982, who reaches a similar conclusion by a different route; contrast Cairns 2011, for whom (p. 31) the poet is just another item on the rich patron's expensive shopping-list – but granted that such magnates had plenty of money and wanted the best of everything, it does not follow, nor does *Isthmian* 2 suggest, that they actually believed that the best of everything *could* be bought).
- 6 τίς ἀγορεύειν βούλεται; See, for example, Demosthenes 18 *On the Crown* 170, Euripides *Suppliants* 438 f.; Hansen 1991: 142.
- 7 From a Marxist point of view, this makes him a particularly dangerous figure, artist of a seductive ideological apparatus which creates false consciousness by concealing class struggle. Rose 2012: 201–66, esp. 249–51 on the application to this period of Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatus (ISA), primarily in reference here to the tyrants Peisistratos of Athens and Kleisthenes of Sikyon, and 262–6 on Solon (and the Athenian Kleisthenes). For Rose, Solon and the tyrants are fundamentally alike, different faces of the same ruling class: there is 'positive gain' for the poor in terms of the conditions of their exploitation (265), but fundamental economic relations remain unchanged; the rhetoric of citizen solidarity is thus 'an ideologically self-serving mystification of the actual relations of citizens to one another' (265), perpetuated by its 'potentially mystifying celebration' among modern scholars (264). Rose is

clearly right to the extent that, however much or little actual redistribution of wealth occurs at this time, the link between power and individual wealth persists, and so too does the collective interest of the wealthy as a class. The question is whether we construe Solon's political moves as a mystifying distraction from class struggle, or rather as opening a new front in such a struggle. This in turn depends on how far we adopt a teleological view of history: the extent to which our view of forces in society is coloured by *ex post facto* judgements of their ultimate success or failure. On the ISA as 'site' as well as 'stake' of class struggle, see e.g. Althusser 1984: 21.

- 8 In this conception of dynamic contradiction, Solon's political thought has affinities with the metaphysical thought of the sixth–fifth-century philosopher Herakleitos of Ephesos. See J.D. Lewis 2006: 122 f. on Solon's 'implicit sense of *harmonia*' (a word which Solon does not use but whose apt Homeric association with ship-building is noted by Lewis) and cf. Herakleitos 22 B 51.
- 9 The text given by Plutarch (*Solon* 18.5) has κράτος 'power' in place of γέρας privilege: a plausible alternative in itself, but possibly a misrecollection based on an unconscious etymologising impulse, since the lines articulate Solon's legendary role as initiator of Athenian democracy, power of the people: κράτος τοῦ δήμου.
- 10 As Rhodes emphasises, the word δῆμος 'can refer either to the whole community or to the mass of the community as opposed to the γνώριμοι [great or prominent individuals]; here the contrast with οἱ . . . εἶχον δύναμιν καὶ χρήμασιν ἥσαν ἀγητοί makes it clear that the latter meaning is intended' (1993: 172). The distinction is not quite so clear-cut; even when, as here, a contrast is drawn between the δῆμος in general and the rich and powerful in particular, it is important to democratic thinking that the latter, the γνώριμοι, are *also* themselves part of the δῆμος. Thus while divisions within the community are acknowledged as undeniably real, they can also be seen as inherently problematic almost to the point of being paradoxical.
- 11 For further discussion see Irwin 2005: 230 n. 71, providing references to earlier discussions and emphasising the fundamental ambiguity.
- 12 So Rhodes 1993: 172 f. (see also the Addendum on p. 771, noting another possibility: Wilamowitz's suggestion that with ἀμφοτέροισι we should understand the noun ὤμοις: 'on both shoulders', emphasising the speaker's embattled state). Irwin 2005: 231 translates 'over both sides'.
- 13 Thus where Elizabeth Irwin concludes her discussion of these verses with the observation that Solon 'can be seen . . . to be participating in tyrannical language', I would suggest that Solon casts himself as tyrannical only in so far as the law itself exercises a kind of benign tyranny. Solon's strategy of blurring the boundary between his own identity and the identity of the laws and constitutional settlement he has – or claims to have – established continues to be reflected much later, into the fourth century, in courtroom speakers' practice of referring to Solon almost as a personification of the law, even when the particular laws in question were clearly of much later date. On Solon as the personification of law, and of legal instruction in particular, see Too 2001. On the political impact of Solon's reforms in the area of family life, creating a model of the 'democratic family', see Lape 2002–03. Of course the benign tyranny of the law is benign only from the standpoint of an underlying *status quo* of gender-based and wealth-based inequality.
- 14 *Suppliants* 438 f.: τίς θέλει πόλει/ χρηστόν τι βούλευμ' ἐς μέσον φέρειν ἔχων. In my translation above, 'bring it forward . . . to share' corresponds to

the Greek words *es meson pherein*, literally ‘carry [it] into the middle’.

- 15 This is not to say that any particular form of education was the exclusive preserve of the elite; there is ample evidence that Athenians of other backgrounds and wealth groups aspired to, appropriated and adapted elements of ‘aristocratic’ education.
- 16 The adjective *banausos* (βάνανσος) describes both the individuals and their craft. Cf. Aristotle’s division of the δῆμος into three groups characterised by farming (γεωργικός), market trading (ἀγοραῖος), and manufacturing trade (βάνανσος): *Politics* 1289b32–3. Elite texts often emphasise a distinction between farming on the one hand and banausic trades on the other. Farming, rooted in the land and associated with sheer physical labour (πόνος), is seen as more honest and honourable, characteristic in nineteenth-century parlance of the ‘deserving poor’; practitioners of other trades, by contrast, are cast as rootless and untrustworthy. Cf. Xenophon *Oeconomicus* 6.5.3: ‘[banausic *tekhnai*] appear to ruin the body and break the spirit . . . the clearest evidence of this would be if, when enemies had invaded the country, someone arranged separate meetings of the farmers and the craftsfolk (*tekhnitai*) and asked them to choose whether to defend the country, or retreat from the land and stay inside the city walls. Under those circumstances . . . those connected with the land would vote to defend [the country], but the *tekhnitai* would vote to do what they’ve been taught to do (*pepaideuntai*), sit on their backsides without doing any hard work or getting in any danger (καθῆσθαι μήτε πονουῦντας μήτε κινδυνεύοντας).’ See Balme 1984, Lis 2009: 40–47. Aristotle in the *Politics* struggles with the question whether *banausoi* and *thêtes*, hired physical labourers, should even be citizens: see Ober 1998: 310–16. Not surprisingly, warm sentiments about farming did not extend to another productive activity deeply ‘rooted’ in the territory of Attica, namely mining, the deadly *ponos* of which fell mostly to slaves; on archaeological evidence for the living space of mining personnel, both overseers and workers, see J.E. Jones 1982: 179; Kakavoyannis 2001: 376 f.
- 17 Marrou, whose view of education is firmly focused elsewhere (note e.g. Marrou 1948: 15 [1956: xiv] ‘l’histoire de l’éducation antique reflète le passage progressif d’une culture de nobles guerriers à une culture de scribes’), is particularly influential but not untypical. Morgan 1999 takes a broad and balanced view of learning in Athens but deliberately and explicitly narrows her focus to literate education. Griffith 2010: 29–33 is unusual among general discussions of Greek education in giving space and prominence to discussion of ‘crafts’, τέχναι (a word which first appears in Marrou in the reference to fifth-century manuals of rhetoric, 1948: 92, 1956: 53). Griffith’s emphasis is on the essentially private nature of craft-learning and, conversely, on the public social standing of craft-practitioners, δημοῦργοι, in early Greece, rather than on its educational significance per se; the transition to the ‘aristocratic warrior-class’ on p. 33 largely sets the agenda for the remainder of the chapter, in spite of its emphasis on *polis*-level institutions. Wider studies of technical knowledge in classical antiquity are provided by Long 2001 and Cuomo 2007.
- 18 See e.g. Isocrates 15 *Antidosis* 181, Plato *Republic* 376e; Marrou 1948: 75 f. [1956: 40 f.].
- 19 Greek *dēmiourgoi*. This phrase may be a marginal gloss which has entered the text in error, in which case the correct text reads ‘that they suffered the same failing’.
- 20 τούτους δὲ γ’ ἤδη ὅτι εὐρήσοιμι πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ ἐπισταμένους. καὶ τούτου μὲν οὐκ ἐψεύσθην, ἀλλ’ ἠπίσταντο ἃ ἐγὼ οὐκ ἠπιστάμην καὶ μου

ταύτη σοφώτεροι ἦσαν. ἀλλ', ὧ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ταυτόν μοι ἔδοξαν ἔχειν ἀμάρτημα ὅπερ καὶ οἱ ποιηταὶ καὶ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ δημοιοῦργοι – διὰ τὸ τὴν τέχνην καλῶς ἐργάζεσθαι ἕκαστος ἡξίου καὶ ἄλλα τὰ μέγιστα σοφώτατος εἶναι, καὶ αὐτῶν αὕτη ἡ πλημμέλεια ἐκείνην τὴν σοφίαν ἀπέκρυπτεν (*Apology* 22d).

- 21 On the ramifications of Socratic ignorance, see Bett 2010.
- 22 Cf. Sharples 1994.
- 23 And, though less elaborately, in Xenophon's; this is one of those characteristics or habits of thought of the 'literary' Socrates which have a decent chance of reflecting those of the real person Socrates son of Sophroniskos.
- 24 This generalisation characterises widespread treatment of *tekhnē* in Plato's dialogues, but does not, of course, begin to do justice to the complexity and sophistication of his philosophical interrogation of these crafts. For deeper exploration see e.g. Nussbaum 2001, esp. 85–121 on *Protagoras*; Roochnik 1996 (with analysis of Plato's use of the actual term *tekhnē* and its cognates, Appendix 1), and G. Harvey 2009 on the fascinating dialogues *Statesman* and *Philebus*, whose 'highly developed conception of *technē* . . . finds a place for such ordinary human activities within the broader framework of Plato's philosophy' (2), specifically through the insight that their attention to correct measure (*to metrion*, and, in the dimension of time, *kairos*) aligns them epistemically and ontologically with the Form of the Good.
- 25 One possible example, suggested by Schiappa 1990 and much discussed since, is the word for the activity of the public speaker: 'rhetoric' (Greek *rhētorikē*, ῥητορική). See Pratt 2015: 164 on the continuing debate over the early history of both rhetoric and 'rhetoric'.
- 26 Citing one instance of each word cited in Greek (not necessarily in a '*tekhnē* analogy' context): γεωργική *Phaedrus* 264b, ἀγελαιοτροφική *Statesman* 261e, ἀγελαιοκομική *Statesman* 299d, ποιμενική *Republic* 345d, βοηλατική *Euthyphro* 13b, ἀμπελοφυρική *Republic* 333d, δρυοτομία *Laws* 678d, δρυοτομική and φλοῖστική *Statesman* 288d.
- 27 δερματοφυρική *Statesman* 280c, σκυτική *Charmides* 174c, σκυτοτομική *Theaetetus* 146d, ξαντική and νηστική *Statesman* 282a, ταλασία *Laws* 805e, ταλασιουργία and ταλασιουργική *Statesman* 282c, ὑφαντική *Gorgias* 449d, οἰκοδομική *Charmides* 170c, χαλκεία *Protagoras* 324e, κεραμεία *Laches* 187b, τεκτονική *Euthydemus* 281a, λυροποιική *Euthydemus* 289c, γραφική and ἀδριαντοποιία *Gorgias* 450c.
- 28 μαγειρική *Republic* 332c, ὀψοποιία *Gorgias* 462e, ὀψοποιική *Gorgias* 463b, βαλανευτική *Sophist* 227a, γναφευτική *Statesman* 282a, κομμωτική *Gorgias* 463b, κοσμητική *Sophist* 227a, μαιευτική *Theaetetus* 161e, ἰατρική *Symposium* 186c, κλεπτική *Republic* 334b, κολακευτική *Gorgias* 464c.
- 29 μουσική *Republic* 335c, ποιητική *Ion* 532c, ῥαψωδική *Ion* 538b, αὐλητική *Philebus* 56a, κιθαριστική *Euthydemus* 289c, κιθαρωδική *Gorgias* 502a, χοροδιδασκαλική *Plato* [?] *Alcibiades I* 125d.
- 30 γυμναστική *Crito* 50e, ἡνιοχική *Ion* 538b, παγκρατιαστική *Euthydemus* 172a, πυκτική *Gorgias* 460d, πεττευτική *Gorgias* 450d, ἵππική *Meno* 70a, κυνηγετική *Euthyphro* 13a, θηρευτική *Statesman* 289a, ἀλευτική *Ion* 538d, ἀσπαλευτική *Sophist* 219d, ὀρνιθευτική *Sophist* 220b.
- 31 βασιλική *Statesman* 259c, πολιτική *Charmides* 170b, νομοθετική *Gorgias* 464b, δικανική *Republic* 405a, δικαστική *Stateman* 303e, ἐμπορική *Philebus*

56e, καπηλική *Sophist* 223d, κυβερνητική *Charmides* 174c, τοξική *Cratylus* 405c, πολεμική *Protagoras* 322b, στρατηγική *Ion* 540d, μαντική *Laches* 198e, οίωνιστική *Phaedrus* 244d.

- 32 ῥητορική *Theaetetus* 177b, σοφιστική *Gorgias* 465c, ἐριστική *Sophist* 226a, ἀντιλογική *Phaedrus* 261d, ἀριθμητική *Protagoras* 357a, λογιστική *Republic* 525a, γεωμετρική *Republic* 527b, διαλεκτική *Phaedrus* 276e. There are various other adjectives/ substantival adjectives with the characteristic -ική ending (X-ική (τέχνη) = ‘(art) of X’) referring to assorted broad groupings of activities or faculties.
- 33 A prior step to the aggregation of knowledge within the context of democratic institutions, on which see Ober 2008: 118–67.
- 34 See Atherton 1998 and Cribiore 2001: 45–73, both focusing on the better-documented culture of schooling of the Hellenistic period.
- 35 See Yamagata 2012: 142 f. It is very unlikely that the rhapsode Nikeratos mentioned at Arist. *Rhet.* 1413a7 is, as has sometimes been assumed, the same person.
- 36 A view of the diverse poems in the two-volume collection under Theognis’ name as an expression of the shared traditions and values of an aristocratic elite is influentially set out in the chapters in Figueira and Nagy 1985. A useful qualification to this view, emphasising the authority of the individual poet which in turn confers authority on this collection, is provided by Hubbard 2006.
- 37 On teaching scenes in vase painting, see Cribiore 2001: 28–34.
- 38 Beaumont 2012: 143–9 assembles the evidence, from vase painting in particular, and interprets it with due caution. In education scenes in general and female education scenes in particular, it is hard to be sure who is depicted, what is being studied and in what context, besides whether the image should be understood as realistic, fictive, or idealised. See also Bundrick 2008 on the interpretation of depictions in vase painting of domestic scenes of textile production.
- 39 This is made clear, for instance, by Thucydides’ grim report of a wartime atrocity in the small Boeotian town of Mukalessos: a band of Thracian mercenaries descending on this settlement massacred the children at a school there, ‘the largest one in the place’ (7.29.5).
- 40 *cuius* [i.e. *Isocratis*] *e ludo tamquam ex equo Troiano meri principes exierunt*, Cicero *De Oratore* 2.94.
- 41 See Vlassopoulos 2003, Evans and Boyte 1986, Gottesman 2014: 49–63.
- 42 Alex Gottesman’s concept of ‘the street’ and Paulin Ismard’s analysis of Athens as a ‘city of networks’ are also highly relevant here: Gottesman 2014, Ismard 2010.
- 43 For a thought-provoking illustrated ‘tour’ and discussion of the classical agora, see Gottesman 2014: 26–43.
- 44 Cf. Ismard 2010: 66.
- 45 Azoulay 2014: 40–42.
- 46 Kosmin 2015 (quotation from p. 145). ‘The Agora offered *ostraka*-casting what the Pnyx could not: the city’s central location, an association with quotidian anti-elite behavior, and the foundational site of democratic freedom’ (150).
- 47 The noun *agora* (ἀγορά) means ‘public gathering’, ‘assembly’ in Homeric epic, but the secondary sense ‘marketplace’ dominates in the classical period; it is

connected etymologically with the verb *ageirō* (ἀγείρω) ‘gather’, ‘bring together’, and forms the root of the verbs *agorazō* (ἀγοράζω), meaning ‘go to the agora’ and hence more commonly ‘buy’, ‘go shopping (for)’, and *agoreuō* (ἀγορεύω) ‘speak in public’, ‘address a gathering of people’: the verb used in the crier’s invitation to the assembly, quoted above. On news and the agora, see Lewis 1996, e.g. 13–19. Cf. also Kosmin 2015: 145: ‘the privileged Athenian location for day-to-day free speech and *loidoria* [verbal abuse]’.

- 48 The text is corrupt and the sense therefore unclear, but presumably the point is that the ‘borrowed’ slave is loyal to the flatterer – and thus in a way ‘belongs’ as much to him as to his official master, or more so – because he gets a cut of the takings. There may be an additional sexual *sous-entendre*.
- 49 As often, the chorus-leader speaks both for the chorus collectively (‘we’) and for himself individually (‘I’).
- 50 My English translation’s avowedly anachronistic and culture-leaping allusion via Keats’ *Ode to a Nightingale* to Hebrew scripture (Ruth 2:3) aims to capture the high literary style of the Greek phrase *μᾶζαν ἐπ’ ἀλλόφυλον* *mazan ep’ allophylon*, more literally ‘to the soft bread of another race’. Eupolis may allude here to Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 851 f. ‘but you, if you go to the land of another race (*es allophylon* . . . *chthona*), will yearn for this country’, or, more probably, to an even more closely similar phrase in another tragedy now lost to us. The surviving fifth-century text in which the rather rare adjective *allophylos* occurs most frequently is Thucydides’ *History*: seven instances, five of them in speeches (4.64.4, 4.86.5, 4.92.3, 6.9.1, 6.23.2) and the others in contexts of similarly elevated style (1.2.4., 1.102.3).
- 51 I.e., for summary execution by being thrown, as those convicted of serious crimes at Athens sometimes were, into the *barathron*, pit. There is consensus among scholars that this is what the phrase must mean; the explanation is in doubt. One suggestion is that the name ‘Oineus’ comes to be slang for the *barathron* through association with the deme (district) Oinoë (Olson 2007: 115) or the organisational tribe Oineïs (Storey 2003: 190 n. 21); but, *pace* Olson, the *barathron* does not seem to have been located in either of the two demes called Oinoë (one belonging to the tribe Hippothontis, the other to the tribe Aiantis: Whitehead 1986: 372 f., and 25 n. 90 on the homonymy), but in the deme Keiriadai close to its boundary with Melite (Lalonde 2006: 114 f.) – a deme which belonged, *pace* Storey, not to the tribe Oeneïs but to Hippothontis (and Melite to Kekropis, Whitehead 1986: 372). The best explanation is thus the mythological one offered by Sommerstein 2000: 448 f. n. 33: Periboia, mother of Tydeus and grandmother of the Iliadic warrior Diomedes, was sent by her father Hipponoös to Oineus to be put to death (Gantz 1993: 334). The explanation is not without problems (Oineus does not in fact kill Periboia but marries her instead, and why should this rather obscure myth mentioned by Hesiod (F 12) have become proverbial in Athens anyway?), but it is the best available.
- 52 The figure of the hanger-on who gets food and physical comforts from the rich at the price of flattery and a certain amount of personal humiliation is perennially popular in literature throughout antiquity and beyond, from Homer onwards: Tylawsky 2002 and, on its exploitation in Eupolis’ play (and the identity of Eupolis’ chorus), Storey 2003: 188–93. On the relationship between the Greek concepts κόλαξ ‘flatterer’/‘toady’ and παράσιτος ‘parasite’/‘scrounger’, see Pernerstorfer 2010. Often the two are sides of the same coin, with a difference of focalisation: a character is a parasite in so far as we vicariously enjoy his skill in getting what he wants, a flatterer in so far as

we recoil from what he has to do in order to get it.

- 53 See Wilkins 2000, Olson 2007: 256–91.
- 54 Wilkins 2000: 369–82, 416.
- 55 Westgate 2015: 87 f.
- 56 Wilkins 2000: 363; Westgate 2015: 88, with n. 188 on the duties of the *trapezopoios*.
- 57 The Greek word *laphyropōlēs* ‘seller of spoils’ applies literally to agents or officials who receive plunder taken by an army and sell it on to realise its market value (Xenophon, *Anabasis* 7.7.56); here it seems to be used metaphorically for a functionary in a wealthy household, probably a slave kitchen overseer (perhaps even a privately owned *trapezopoios* such as the one referred to in the confiscation-lists of the ‘Attic Stelai’: Pritchett and Pippin 1956: 279), who can be induced to turn a blind eye to minor losses.
- 58 Demont 1993.
- 59 As Wilkins 2000 amply demonstrates; see e.g. 416–18.
- 60 The text here may be corrupt.
- 61 Text and sense here are again uncertain.
- 62 For a review of interpretations of *On What Is Not*, see Schiappa 1997; for an analysis of its arguments and defence of their coherence, Castelnérac 2013, 2014.
- 63 The fragment also presents us with an early example of the developing stereotype of the *leptos*, an eccentric often with scholarly interests but whose identifying characteristic is that he is alarmingly thin, who becomes a stock target of jokes in later Greek literature. The correspondence between physicality and discourse is a common feature of jokes about *leptoi*: see Nisbet 2003.
- 64 The text of the fragment is corrupt in various places. In line 7, <φίλε> ‘my friend’ is Richards’ supplement; <συλλεχθεισῶν τῶν> ‘gathered together’ in line 10 is Kassel’s; in line 31 τοιαῦτ’ ἀπρεπὲς ποιεῖν ‘such behaviour’s terribly rude’ is Erfurdt’s (the MS reading is τοιαῦτα ποιεῖν εὐπρεπὲς ‘it’s polite [*sic*] to behave that way’). In line 35, <αὖ πορδῆν> ‘again on – the fart’ is Meineke’s, following Emperius; Meineke also suggests <ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὴν κολοκύντην> ‘the gourd from the start again’, as an alternative. See also Olson 2007: 228 f., 238–42.
- 65 The reference to a ‘herd’ (ἀγελή) of young man suggests the specialised Spartan and Cretan use of this term for ‘bands’ of young men engaged in training, and may be used here to characterise Plato (not without justification) as an admirer of Spartan ideas; but there are other unexpected Doricisms in the passage (see Olson 2007: 238 f.), and without more context it is impossible to be certain.
- 66 Σικελᾶς ἀπὸ γᾶς for ‘from the land of Sicily’ is a conspicuous Doricism, appropriate to the extent that Doric dialect was spoken in Sicily and is also often spoken by doctor-characters in comedy, but otherwise hard to explain here without more context.
- 67 The recondite character of Plato’s thought is a target of comedy elsewhere: see e.g. Amphis F 6 (where Plato’s concept of The Good seems to be a byword for obscurity), Philippides F 6 (where The Good is perhaps represented as a kind of ‘holy grail’), and Kratinos Junior F 10, on Plato’s conception of the soul.

- 68 See Wilkins 2000: 322–63.
- 69 The nouns *theōros* and *theōria* and the verb *theōreō* probably have as their first linguistic element the noun *theā* ‘sight, spectacle’, which also forms the verb *theāomai* ‘I watch’ and the nouns *theātron* ‘theatre’ and *theātēs* ‘spectator’, but the noun *theos* ‘god’ is also a contender and may have influenced the development of the word’s meaning: see Rutherford 2013: 4–6 on the words’ etymology and semantic range.
- 70 On *theōria* as a cultural practice, see the chapter of that title in Nightingale 2004 (pp. 41–71), I. Rutherford 2000: 134–6 (distinguishing between nine senses of the word *θεωρία* in religious contexts), and especially Rutherford 2013 (12–14 on the term ‘pilgrimage’). On the question whether, and if so when and to what extent, participation in dramatic festivals was itself thought of as a form of *theōria*, see also Goldhill 1999, Nightingale 2004: 49–52, Roselli 2011: 101–4.
- 71 On the *topos* of ‘the wise man’s visit to Egypt’, see Livingstone 2001: 156 f.
- 72 Rutherford 2013: 51 f. with n. 5.
- 73 There is a comic development of this idea in Aeschylus’ satyr-play *Theoroi* or *Isthmiasiai*, where the chorus of satyrs are fascinated by startlingly realistic images of themselves (perhaps masks), which they are to nail to the temple pediment (F 78a). ‘The idea of the satyrs coming on as a Dionysiac *theōria* is very appealing, but we would need more fragments to know for sure’ (Rutherford 2013: 342).
- 74 On Hermippos in general and on this fragment, F 63, in particular, see Gilula 2000. Hermippos’ prosecution of Aspasia on a charge of impiety (ἁσέβεια) was clearly a comic fantasy, but it soon made the easy transition in antiquity to being treated as a historical incident, and provided sensational material for Plutarch’s *Life of Pericles* (32). Pace Gilula (2000: 81 f.), there is no reason to doubt the assignment of this fragment to *Phormophoroi* on the strength of the excerpt at Hesychius δ 1922 (Gilula’s hypothesis (2000: 82) of a line ‘repeated elsewhere’ by Hermippos is clutching at straws); Polemon of Ilion’s statement that ‘Hermippos the poet of Old Comedy was another author who composed parodies’ (F 45. 45 f.) should not be taken to refer to works in a distinct genre, or indeed to imply anything more than the known fact that Hermippos’ comedies made use of parody (see also Wilkins 2000: 158 with n. 11; Olson 2007: 158).
- 75 Used to make gruel, a staple food familiar in comedy: W.C. West 2011: 126 with n. 9.
- 76 Sitalkes’ Thracians were (for a time) allies of the Athenians; mange is probably comically appropriately from the Athenian point of view as a reference to uncivilised living conditions in the wild North, and the addition of ‘for the Spartans’ thus comes in as a wish-fulfilling surprise punchline. On the comic possibilities of mange, a malignant itchy condition affecting both humans and other animals, see Storey 2003: 211.
- 77 Cheese regularly figures among premium products worth importing to Attica: see e.g. Griffith 2010: 306.
- 78 ‘Acorns of Zeus’ (*diosbalanoi*) are chestnuts, but the grandiose name for a fairly humble foodstuff triggers a mock-heroic tone which continues in the over-the-top expression ‘sparkling almonds’ and in the Homeric phrase ‘trappings of the feast’ (*Odyssey* 1.152, 21.430; cf. Olson 2007: 163).
- 79 This interpretation would obviously be on a firmer footing if we knew that

Phormophoroi was performed at the City Dionysia. Other explanations are available. ‘Dionysus on board a ship’ is a motif found in various mythic, literary, artistic and cult contexts; it is also possible that Dionysus was actually a character in the play, if Hermippos F 77 is to be assigned to *Phormophoroi*; see Olson 2007: 159. Wilkins 2000: 157 f. prefers a mythological explanation for the motif of ‘Dionysus *nauklēros*’.

- 80 Thuc. 2.38, [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 2.7, Xen. *Ways and Means* i1.3–8. This *topos* was later assimilated into standard rhetorical prescriptions for ‘praise of a country’: Livingstone 2001: 120 f.
- 81 The ‘riches of Athens’ motif is on a continuum with the popular comic theme of fantastical lands of ease and plenty, imagined sometimes in a world far away in time or space but sometimes quite close to the Athenian here-and-now. On the connection between such fantasies and the democratic ideology of Periclean Athens, see Ceccarelli 1996; for a wider survey of this comic *topos* and discussion of its significance, Ruffell 2000.
- 82 Probably in 416 bc; on this much-discussed episode, see esp. Mann 2007: 230–43.
- 83 See Cassio 1985, Morgan 1986 and Storey 2003: 198. Hyperbolos’ way of talking was mocked by comic playwrights, but as ‘substandard Attic’ rather than foreign-influenced: see Colvin 2000: 288–90.
- 84 Cf. Storey 2003: 201 f.
- 85 On my translation of the adverb ἀτόπως (used here in a very unusual way), see Scholia on Plato’s *Phaedrus* 60b and Cassio 1985: 41.
- 86 Cf. Storey 2003: 201 f. (‘lack of education . . . rough education on the streets’); οὐδὲ γινώσκειν δοκῶν ‘pretending not even to understand’ echoes *Knights* 1146 οὐδὲ δοκῶν ὁρᾶν ‘pretending I don’t even see’. ‘This must be spoken by Marikas himself, referring to his early life. Taken with F 208, Quintilian’s description of Marikas’ confession (*nihil se ex musice scire nisi litteras confitetur* [‘he admits that he knows nothing of *mousikē* beyond the alphabet’]), it reveals a scene where Marikas describes his life and character (compare those of the *allantopōlēs* [sausage-seller] at *Kn[ights]* 411–26, 1232–48)’ (Storey 2003: 211).
- 87 On gossip and exchange of news in barbers’ shops, see also Buxton 1994: 11 f.; S. Lewis 1996; Vlassopoulos 2007: 40–43; Gottesman 2014: 59 f., and 55–63 on socialising in shops in general.
- 88 Lysias 23 *Against Pankleon* 2–3. The polemarch was the magistrate responsible for dealing with private grievances against resident aliens (*metoikoi*). Plataians, like Athenian citizens, were enrolled in a ‘deme’ or administrative district; Dekeleia is the deme, Hippothontis the organisational ‘tribe’ (*phylē*).
- 89 Or in this case the ‘who’s not who’, since the speaker’s purpose is to disprove the status claimed by Pankleon and to expose him as a social nonentity, a slave. Gottesman 2014: 166–9 uses this speech to illustrate the social drama of the procedure of ἀφαίρεσις εἰς ἐλευθερίαν (‘removal to freedom’) by which free or slave status might be established.
- 90 οὐδὲ προσφοιτᾷ πρὸς τι τούτων τῶν ἐν τῇ πόλει κουρέων ἢ μυροπωλίων ἢ τῶν ἄλλων ἐργαστηρίων οὐδὲ πρὸς ἓν (52).
- 91 Cf. also Theopompos’ observation (F 204) that body-hair removal workshops are just as familiar among the Etruscans as barbers’ shops are in Greece.
- 92 Theophrastos F 76 = Plutarch *Table Talk* 679a, 716a.
- 93 Cf. Dunbar 1995: 681 on *Birds* 1440 f.

- 94 Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 4.2.1, cf. Gottesman 2014: 59; this is not exactly evidence that youths were not *allowed* to enter the Agora, *pace* Sellars 2003: 209.
- 95 ἐφιστάμενος εἰς τοὺς ὄχλους καὶ καθίζων ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐργαστήρισι λόγους ἐποιεῖτο ὡς δεινὰ πεπονθὼς εἶη ὑπ' ἐμοῦ καὶ τῶν χρημάτων ἀπεστερημένος (Isocrates 18 *Against Callimachus* 9). Isocrates' speaker accuses this man of 'telling stories' (*logous epoeito*) just as the (truthful) barber in Plutarch's anecdote was branded a 'story-teller' (*logopoios*, Plut. *Nic.* 30.3). The word ἐργαστήριον 'workshop' encompasses the work of manufacturing, providing services and selling, and thus includes some places we might think of as 'factories' (like the substantial arms manufactory owned by Lysias and his brother, Lysias 12 *Against Eratosthenes* 8) and others, like barbers' shops and perfumeries, we would think of as shops.
- 96 For another perspective on rhetoric and gossip, note Gottesman's suggestion that *publication* of speeches was also, among other things, an effective way of feeding the 'rumor mill' (Gottesman 2014: 17 f.).
- 97 See also Vlassopoulos 2007: 40–42 on this and other examples.
- 98 Thus it is a 'rebukey' to his fellow citizens (Gottesman 2014: 61), but it is not *merely* a rebukey; it is part of a characteristically Isocratean strategy of getting the audience on side (*captatio benevolentiae*) using the paradoxical means of criticism (νοουθετεῖν). It is true that the shop-chatter Isocrates describes is negative in force, taking the form of passive grumbling about the current state of things, but its marginal element of positive content, viz. the perception that 'this is the worst we've ever had it under a democracy' (i.e., not including episodes such as the year of the Thirty), is what Isocrates develops as the germ of his proposal for a return to democracy as it (supposedly) used to be.
- 99 Ancient testimony on Socrates and Simon: Giannantonio 1990 VI B 87–93; see also Sellars 2003: 207 n. 3. Dialogues: see especially D. Clay 1994: 27 f., 32 f., 43. Archaeology: Thompson 1960; Sellars 2003: 208 n. 7, with additional refs; Tsakirgis 2005: 70–74 (with Figure 5.2), 76 f. Tsakirgis (70 f.) emphasises the fact that the cup base was found just *outside* the building, but also notes additional finds inside the house (74) which support its identification as a cobbler's shop. Scholars' reactions to the archaeological evidence, which is substantial but not conclusive, have been oddly polarised between ready acceptance and radical scepticism. Clay's wavering attitude, noted with surprise by Sellars (2003: 208 n. 9), appears to be due to the cautionary influence of Charles Kahn: see D. Clay 1994: 47 n. 53. Gottesman 2014: 43 points to the significance of a cobbler's shop per se, whether Simon's or not, being located directly opposite such a political focal point as the Tholos. The legend of Simon lives on in the figure of Stavros Melissinos, 'poet-sandalmaker of the agora', whose website reports that an American archaeologist told him that his shop (then at 89 Pandrossou, now at 2 Aghias Theklas, both addresses within a few hundred metres of the Tholos) was 'on the exact spot' where Simon ran his business and joked that Melissinos might be the reincarnation of Simon or even of Socrates himself (<http://www.melissinos-poet.com/eng/history.html>).
- 100 I.e., his παρρησία: Diogenes Laertius 2.123.
- 101 Hock 1976; Sellars 2003: 211–13.
- 102 See Gottesman 2014: 60 f. on shop talk as 'politically instrumental'.

3 The citizen performer

Bless you, Phaedrus, I shall be absurd! Against a proper author – an ordinary person, improvising on the same subject¹

(Plato, *Phaedrus* 236d)

The skills and experience acquired, in agora, theatre, or elsewhere by the citizens of Athens were diverse and did not in general conform to a fixed curriculum. When non-elite citizens participated in the assembly or in other *loci* of political debate it was not by superior specialist preparation that they had the best chance of distinguishing themselves. This is one of the reasons for the particular power in Athenian democratic contexts of the ‘rhetoric of anti-rhetoric’, the perennial persuasive technique of casting one’s speech as rough-and-ready and spontaneous and opponents’ speech as elaborately crafted, sophisticated and (by implication if not assertion) deceitful.² To refer to the other side’s ‘preparation’ (*paraskeuē*) is an effective way to excite prejudice against them. It works, of course, by raising the spectre of a sinister conspiracy or plot: unseen machinations of which the audience of assembly members or jurors have limited knowledge and which threaten their power and autonomy by seeking to pre-empt their deliberations; but it also plays on and cultivates a sense that any and all advance preparation is a likely sign of dishonest intent.³ This is, of course, a rhetorical game which acknowledges and deflects anxiety about rhetorical skill while continuing to reward such skill: the best rhetoricians are also the best anti-rhetoricians.

Is there any way out of this double bind? The (artful) critique of artful speech conjures at least the mirage of another kind of political performance which is spontaneous, popular and open to all, in the spirit of the herald’s general invitation for contributions in the assembly. This chapter focuses on a relatively neglected treatise which advocates precisely this kind of improvisatory political performance: Alcidas of Elaia’s *Indictment of Written Speeches* or, to give it its conventional title, *On Writers of Written Speeches* or *On Sophists* (*On Writers* for short).⁴ As will be seen, *On Writers* is not so much an attack on writing as a deliberate advocacy of a practically minded model for political engagement based on improvised speech with popular appeal. Alcidas presents a model of education which derives its authority not from private expertise or from theories and precepts

abstracted from the political here-and-now, but from direct engagement in the everyday contingencies of the city. He is distinctive in celebrating, rather than regretting or seeking to restrain, the popular, participatory and spontaneous character of democratic politics.

Writing the city

Democratic Athens is a city of words, especially of spoken words, verbal performances. It is also increasingly a city of written words, characterised by a spiralling 'epigraphic habit' and by the growing circulation of all manner of texts in written form (a process which culminates later in the encapsulation of the verbal essence of Greek culture in *ta biblia*, 'the books', the classic works which, under Roman rule, every well-to-do male Greek with cultural pretensions was expected to have at his fingertips in digested form). The capture of the city's verbal capital in writing perhaps acquires greater unconscious urgency after the near-death experience of defeat by the Spartans in the Peloponnesian War; it certainly accelerates.⁵ The growing tendency for the city of words to record and represent itself in writing is reflected in the dissemination of written versions of lawcourt and assembly speeches, and in a proliferation of other forms of prose writing.⁶ Plato's Socratic dialogues present a vivid picture of the speech-hungry city of the generation before him, while his educational rival Isocrates, a teacher of political rhetoric but constitutionally and ideologically a writer rather than a performer, composes elaborate written speeches fictively set in the assembly, the courts, or in other public arenas.

For both these authors, the creation of written representations of particular aspects of the city of words is in turn a means to define a particular form of speech which for them is of unique (if not exclusive) educational value: in Plato's case, philosophical dialectic; in Isocrates', stylistically polished and morally elevated discussion of large political concerns. With a backward look in both cases (Plato to Socrates, Isocrates to an imagined golden age of moderate democracy), they use writing to present visions of a better world than the Athenian here and now. Their influence hardly needs emphasis: Plato's in setting the agenda for a whole philosophical tradition (and, through his pupil Aristotle, in defining academic disciplines), Isocrates' in perfecting the elegant, ethically informed prose discourse which became one of the key components of later Greek *paideia*, and thus in turn of Ciceronian and Renaissance humanism.

Suspicion of writing in Athens

Writing was not embraced in democratic Athens without reservation. In Aeschylus' tragedy *Suppliants* (463 bc), the Greek king Pelasgos faces down a violent Egyptian herald attempting to seize the refugee daughters of Danaos, who have found sanctuary in Argos:

As for these women – when they choose from
their own hearts' good will,

Then you can take them, if you persuade them
with argument under divine law.

But this is what the city, by the people's act,
unanimously

Has ruled as its decree: we'll never render them
by force,

This band of women. That's fixed, make no
mistake,

Stuck hard as nails to stay as its been set.

This isn't written on wax tablets

Or sealed away in rolls of papyrus

But plain to hear from a free man's mouth

And tongue. (940–49)

The king's rhetoric aligns writing with foreignness, tyranny and violence, oral speech with the freedom and consensual authority of Argos (imagined in this play as a 'democratic monarchy'). Identification of writing with despotism, secrecy, and avoidance of shared public space is an enduring strand in Athenian democratic rhetoric.⁷ The most famous critique of writing is, of course, Plato's at the end of the *Phaedrus*. Socrates tells a story in which the Egyptian god Theuth presents writing, among many other inventions, to the king Thamous. It does not find favour: it is judged not to aid memory, as Theuth supposed, but to cause forgetfulness, because those who rely on it let their memory fall into disuse; what it imparts to would-be learners is not wisdom, but the illusion of wisdom (275a–b). In the ensuing discussion, Socrates criticises writing for its inability to

respond to readers' questions, or to choose the readers themselves, and thus to achieve real communication. A written text is on the one hand frustratingly static and self-important, keeping solemn silence when questioned like a painted figure; and on the other hand treacherously mobile and promiscuous, content to pass indiscriminately through the hands of all (275d–e). The inadequacy of writing is contrasted with the true knowledge communicated by philosophical dialectic, imagined, thought-provokingly, as 'writing on the soul' (276a).⁸ This presents a kind of caveat to the vision of educational *logos* embodied in the dialogues: they can (perhaps) adumbrate what philosophical dialectic is about and why it is important, but they do not contain it and cannot communicate it adequately.

Alcidamas, author of *On Writers*, was a native of the city of Elaia (later to serve as port for the more powerful city of Pergamon) in Asia Minor, but probably spent a significant period of his life in Athens.⁹ The remains of his writings strongly suggest immersion in an Athenian intellectual milieu, and they seem to have been well known to the Athenian writers Plato and Isocrates. He was roughly contemporary with Isocrates (436–338 bc), but little more is known of his biography;¹⁰ he is credited with various rhetorical writings and an intriguing work known as the *Mouseion* which will be discussed further below. In one rhetorical work, the *Messenian Speech*, he (or a speaker/ character) made the memorable assertion that 'god gave everyone their freedom: no one was made a slave by nature.'¹¹ In *On Writers*, Alcidamas insists on the shortcomings of written texts for purposes of live public performance, and extols the value of his own educational program which prioritises the ability to improvise. The work figures frequently in scholarly discussions of the *Phaedrus* passage mentioned above, with which it has close parallels,¹² and its intertextualities with several of Isocrates' writings have also been much discussed, but deserves more attention than it has received: it is of considerable interest in its own right.¹³ Since the work is not widely known or readily accessible, and because translation is a convenient way of tackling or indicating my position on the fairly numerous problems of interpretation of the Greek text, I provide Alcidamas' work in my own English translation here.

On Writers

Because some of the people who are called sophists have not bothered with learning or education and are just as inexperienced in the ability to speak

as ordinary citizens, but have practised writing speeches and are self-important and pleased with themselves for displaying their own cleverness in books, and have acquired a tiny fraction of the power of speaking in public but lay claim to the whole science, for this reason I shall attempt to carry out a prosecution of written speeches, (2) not because I think of their power as something which does not belong to me, but because there are other things on which I pride myself more, and I believe that writing should be practised as a sideline to speaking. I regard those who spend out their lives on this activity itself as falling far short of both rhetoric and philosophy, and think they would much more rightly be called poets than sophists.

(3) First of all one might despise writing because it is readily mastered and easy and accessible to people of any level of ability. To speak on the spur of the moment about any given subject competently, and deploy a rapid facility in thought and vocabulary, and show good judgement in keeping pace with the demands of the moment and the wishes of the audience and speak as these demand – this is not a task for all levels of ability or just any education; but to write over a long period of time, and correct at leisure, and, by comparing the written works of earlier sophists, gather ideas together from many sources, and imitate the successes of what has been well said, and improve some elements on the basis of advice from ordinary citizens, while turning other features over many times in one's own mind in order to correct and rephrase them – this is something naturally easy even for people with no education. (5) And everything that is good and admirable is rare and hard and generally comes from much hard work, while things that are mean and worthless display ease of acquisition: so since writing is more straightforward for us than speaking, it would be reasonable for us to regard its acquisition as less valuable. (6) Again, no sensible person would doubt that those who are good at speaking will write speeches competently with a slight modification of their mental disposition; but as for those who have practised writing, no one would believe that on the basis of the same faculty they will be able to speak as well. It is probable, when people who can perform difficult tasks turn their mind to easier ones, that they take the execution of those tasks in hand with facility; but for those who have exercised themselves in easy tasks, attending to harder ones is an unyielding and uphill business. This can be understood from the following examples: (7) if someone able to lift a heavy load turned to lighter ones he would be able to take them in hand easily; but someone whose strength had only attained light ones would not be able to carry anything heavier. And again, a swift runner would easily be able to keep up with slower ones, but a slow one would not be able to run alongside faster ones. And again also someone able to strike distant targets accurately with a spear or arrow will easily hit close targets as well, but in

the case of someone who knows how to throw at close targets, it is not yet clear whether he will be able to hit distant targets as well. (8) Similarly in the case of speeches, the man who can deploy them well on the spur of the moment will obviously, given time and leisure, be an exceptional composer of speeches in writing; but as for the man who spends his time on writing, it is obvious that when he makes the transition to improvised speeches, his mind will be full of hesitation and wandering and confusion.

(9) I also believe that speaking is always and consistently useful in human life, whereas the faculty of writing is seldom opportune for it. Everyone knows that speaking on the spur of the moment is essential when people speak in the assembly or in court or engage in private conversations, and that opportunities for getting things done often turn up unexpectedly – at which point those who stay silent will seem insignificant, whereas we see that those who speak are revered by the rest as having a godlike intellect. (10) You see, when it is necessary to reprimand wrongdoers or comfort the unfortunate or calm the angry¹⁴ or refute accusations suddenly brought forward, that is when the power of speaking is able to come to the aid of human need. But writing requires leisure, and takes time which is longer than the occasion: the occasion demands swift assistance in competitive situations, whereas writing completes speeches at leisure and slowly. So – what sensible person would aspire to this faculty, which falls so far short of the demands of the occasion? (11) Wouldn't it be ridiculous, when the herald gives the invitation 'Which of the citizens wishes to address the assembly?', or when the waterclock in the courts has already started, if the speaker went off to his desk to compose and learn a speech? Honestly, if we were despots of our own cities, then it would be in our power to summon the courts and initiate debates about public business, and that way, once we had written our speech, we could call the other citizens then to come and listen to them. But since these responsibilities lie with others, isn't it stupid for us to engage in any other practice of speeches < . . . > on the contrary, they are precise. (12) Because if speeches with elaborate wording, which are more like poems than speeches, and have lost their spontaneity and closer resemblance to the truth but rather appear to have been fabricated and composed in advance, fill the minds of their audience with disbelief and resentment < . . . > (13) And this is the strongest proof: writers of speeches for the courts avoid precise formulations and imitate improvisers' choice of words, and consider themselves to be writing best when they create speeches which resemble written ones as little as possible. And when for the speechwriters themselves the height of competence is to imitate improvisers, surely the training we should respect the most is the one which will provide us with a facility in this category of speeches?

(14) I believe that a further reason why we should reject written

speeches is that they create inconsistency in the lives of those who employ them. To know written speeches on every subject is something which is impossible by nature; and it is inevitable, when someone partly improvises and partly reproduces, that his speech will be uneven and invite criticism for the speaker; parts of it will seem close to acting and recitation, and the other parts will appear poor and feeble by comparison with the polish of the rest.

(15) It is shocking if someone who lays claim to philosophy and promises to teach others can display his own cleverness when he has his writing-tablet and book, but when he is deprived of them, is no better off than the uneducated; is able to produce a speech if he is given time, but right now on the subject put before him has no more of a voice than ordinary people; advertises an art of speeches, but turns out to have not the slightest power of speaking within him. Practice in writing does more than anything else to instil hesitancy in speaking. (16) This is because, when someone has acquired the habit of working on speeches a little at a time, putting the words together in precisely calculated arrangements and bringing his choice to a conclusion through slow processes of the intellect, if he is then faced with improvised speaking it is inevitable that his mind will be full of hesitancy and confusion, because what he is doing is contrary to his habit. He will be uncomfortable with everything, and seem just like people with a speech defect; he will never display the adaptable mental resourcefulness necessary for a supple and easy-going approach to speechmaking. (17) Just as prisoners released from their chains after long captivity cannot walk in the same way as others do, but revert to the postures and patterns in which they were compelled to move whilst chained, so writing gives the intellect a slow step. Gaining its practice in opposing habits, it makes the mind a helpless prisoner, and obstructs all the free flow of improvisation.

(18) In my view, learning written speeches is difficult, memorising them is laborious, and forgetting them leads to disgrace in competitive situations. All would agree that it is harder to learn and commit to memory many small things than a few big ones. Well, in the case of improvisation one need only apply one's thought to the arguments, and find the words to express them on the spur of the moment; but with written speeches it is necessary to ensure precise learning and recollection of the words and phrases. (19) Well, speaking involves a few big arguments, but many tiny words and expressions with small differences between them; each argument is put forward only once, whereas we are often obliged to use the same words many times over. This is why memorising arguments is easy, but with words the memory is hard to achieve and the knowledge hard to preserve. (20) Again, when improvising, slips of memory cause only unseen embarrassment: the choice of material can be adapted, and the words have

not been precisely honed to fit their place, so if an argument escapes him the speaker can easily pass over it and go on to the following arguments, bringing no disgrace on his speech. (21) When delivering written speeches, on the other hand, if the slightest bit is left out or altered in the heat of the moment, this inevitably results in helpless confused rambling, long pauses, and often in the speech being broken with silence. This helplessness is unseemly, ridiculous, and hard to remedy.

(22) I also think that improvisers can attend to the wishes of their audience better than deliverers of written speeches. The latter have laboured on their text long before the competitive occasion, and sometimes miss the mood of the moment: either they alienate their listeners by speaking longer than they want, or their speech runs out while people are still ready to listen to them. (23) It is hard, if not impossible, for human forethought to predict what is going to happen in such a way as to anticipate precisely how listeners' mind will be disposed as regards length of speeches. In improvisation, though, it is in the speaker's power to dole out his speech with an eye on their mental capacities,¹⁵ cutting long passages short or expanding on what they had envisaged concisely. (24) Besides that, we can see that the two kinds of speakers do not have equal ability to make use of arguments offered by the competitive occasion itself. If they are given an argument by their opponents, or if concentration of the mind enables them to come up with an idea of their own, speakers who do not use writing can easily find a place for it. They put everything into words on the spur of the moment, so even if they say more than they planned, it does not introduce any unevenness or confusion into their speech. (25) But when people enter a competition with written speeches, supposing some argument presents itself which was not part of their plan, it is hard to fit it in and use it appropriately. The precise elaboration of the words cannot accommodate windfalls, and the only options are either not to use the arguments good fortune has given, or, by using them, to break open and demolish the verbal construction and, by speaking precisely in some parts and at random in others, make the style confused and inconsistent. (26) Who in their right mind, then, would sign up to a form of study which prevents taking advantage even of windfall benefits, and is sometimes less help in competitive situations than chance? One which, where the usual role of other arts is to improve human life, instead actually gets in the way of windfall opportunities?

(27) In fact I think written speeches are not rightly even called 'speeches'. They are like ghosts or shapes or imitations of speeches, and it would make sense to judge them in the same way as bronze statues and stone images and pictures of living things. Those are imitations of the real bodies, and are pleasant to look at, but have no usefulness in human life. (28) Similarly, the written speech, possessing a single shape and

construction, can be impressive in a way when viewed in a book, but in live situations, motionless as it is, is of no benefit to its possessor. Just as real bodies which are much inferior in looks to beautiful statues are many times more useful than them when it comes to action, so a speech spoken from the mind itself on the spur of the moment is alive and breathing and follows the situation and has the characteristics of real bodies. The written speech, on the other hand, has the character of an image of a speech, and can play no part in beneficial action.

(29) Someone might say that it is unreasonable for me to bring charges against the power of writing when I am evidently using it myself to publicise my ideas, and to dismiss out of hand the technique by means of which people seek a reputation throughout Greece; and that it is odd for someone whose profession is philosophy to praise improvised speech, and to regard chance as more profitable than forethought and haphazard speakers as wiser than considered writers. (30) Firstly, though, I have said what I have said not because I discount the power of writing, but because I think it is less good than improvisation, and believe that most practice should be devoted to the ability to speak. Secondly, I do use writing, but it is not what I pride myself on the most; I just want to show those who make much of their skill in this faculty that we, with little effort, will be able to consign their speeches to oblivion and ruin. (31) Moreover, I make use of writing for the purpose of display-performances presented to the crowd. In the case of people who meet with us often, we use the other method, and invite them to test us, and when they do we can speak suitably and intelligently on any subject proposed. But in the case of those who come to our lectures after some time, and have never encountered us before,¹⁶ we try to show them something we have written. Being accustomed to hearing other people's written speeches, they might form a lower opinion of us than we deserve if they heard us improvising.

(32) Apart from that, evidence of the progress which can be expected to occur in someone's intellect can be seen most clearly in written speeches. It is not easy to judge whether we improvise better now than we did before. Recollection of the speeches we delivered in the past is difficult; but by looking in written works, as in a mirror, it is easy to survey the progress of the mind. It is also because of our desire to leave memorials of ourselves, indulging our ambitious impulses, that we try to put speeches in writing. (33) And in any case it is not right to suppose that, in preferring the faculty of improvisation to that of writing, we are encouraging people to speak haphazardly. So far as arguments and organisation are concerned, we hold that speakers should employ them with forethought. It is the verbal expression that should be improvised. This is because the precision made possible by written speeches is not as beneficial as the appropriateness that comes from expression in words chosen there and then. (34) So, anyone

who wants to become a skilled speaker, rather than an adequate composer of speeches; who is more interested in responding well to the occasion than in using words precisely; who would rather have the goodwill of the audience supporting him than their suspicion as his opponent; who would like to secure an adaptable intellect, a ready memory, and a cover for what he forgets; who is eager to gain a facility in speaking which matches the needs of life – if such a person chose to devote vigorous exercise always and everywhere to improvisation, while practising writing as a playful sideline, wouldn't he rightly be judged sensible among sensible people?

The argument of *On Writers*

On Writers begins:

Because some of the people who are called sophists have not bothered with learning and education, and are just as inexperienced in the ability to speak as ordinary citizens, but have practised writing speeches and are self-important and pleased with themselves for displaying their own cleverness in books, and have acquired a tiny fraction of the power of speaking in public but lay claim to the whole science (*tekhnē*), for this reason I shall attempt to carry out an indictment (*katēgoria*) of written speeches . . . (*On Writers* 1)

The contemptuous reference to other 'so-called' experts who are dismissed into anonymity, the attack on their baseless claims, the antithesis between such (supposed) experts and ordinary citizens (*idiōtai*), and the speaker's complaint against sweeping assertions about *tekhnē* are all features which align this text with an established fifth–fourth-century genre of treatises in which an expert sets out his own conception of an art or discipline in contrast with those of his rivals.¹⁷ *On Writers* defines itself as a manifesto, belonging to a class of compositions (for oral performance or written circulation) aiming to say what *tekhnē* really is. These compositions characteristically begin by denouncing incompetent and irresponsible rivals who have traduced the profession before going on to present their own superior understanding. This raises the expectation that the author will set out his own views of the potential and limits of rhetorical education.

The declared programme of the speech then comes as something of a surprise. Rather than expound his own view of *tekhnē*, Alcidas proposes to present an 'indictment of written speeches'. This invites the expectation that the work will follow, at least in essentials, the conventions of the lawcourt, albeit a court trying a rather unusual defendant. Odd prosecution speeches were not unknown in the literary culture of Athens and other Greek cities in the fourth century

bc. There were writers who drew attention to their expertise by composing demonstration-speeches (*epideixeis*) which exploited the prestige of epic poetry by imagining legal disputes among the heroes of the Trojan War: we might expect this indictment to be something similar.¹⁸ There was also a vogue for speeches which made a virtue of tackling paradoxical or improbable themes, and a written indictment of written works fits this description well.¹⁹ It soon becomes clear, however, that the announcement of an indictment is a *mis*-labelling of *On Writers*; the speech is not organised like a prosecution, nor is it prosecutorial in tone; it makes little attempt to create a courtroom atmosphere.²⁰

Alcidamas emphasises that the motivation for this prosecution against written speeches is not that he lacks skill in writing himself, but that he regards speaking as more important. Rivals who have devoted their careers to writing have missed what is at the core of rhetoric and philosophy,²¹ and would more accurately be called *poiētai* (here ‘manufacturers’, though this is also the word for ‘poets’) than true experts (*sophistai*).

Criticism of writing alternates with praise of its opposite: improvised *speaking*.²² Writing, Alcidamas claims, is easy; speaking, on the other hand, requires real talent in judging the situation, deciding what is required, and responding instantly (*On Writers* 2–3). By contrast, the writer works at his leisure, making corrections, borrowing from earlier texts, taking advice, revising again and again. None of this requires any special training; in fact, it is easy even for the uneducated (4).

Alcidamas goes on to present simple examples illustrating this contrast between writing and improvisation, in a section of the work which itself seems like a demonstration of the fluent abundant invention of material (*euporia*) which characterises the skilled improviser. In general, more valuable activities are harder than less valuable ones. Now all would agree that skilled speakers will need only minor retraining in order to write speeches competently,²³ but no one would believe the converse, that someone with practice in writing would for that reason also be able to speak (6). In general those who can do what is harder (lift a heavier load, run faster, throw a javelin further) can also do what is easier (lift less, run slower, throw less far) as well: this therefore confirms that writing is easier than improvisation (7–8).

In the main body of Alcidamas’ argument, two themes are interwoven. One is the ability of the extempore speaker to respond to

the needs of the moment and take advantage of opportunities (in ancient Greek rhetorical terms, his ability to respond to *kairos*, opportunity or the needs of the moment),²⁴ contrasted with the cumbersome fixity of writing. The other is the artificially polished, and therefore stilted, style of writing (rhetorically speaking, its *akribēia*, ‘precision’, ‘exactitude’, ‘refinement’), contrasted with the relaxed, unforced and fluent self-expression of the improviser.

Improvisation, Alcidas continues, is able to adapt itself to the changing needs of human life. It is essential in the assembly, in court and in private conversations (9). There are many other occasions (*kairoī*) when someone who knows what to say gains admiration, reprimanding fellow-citizens for their failures, comforting them in their misfortunes, soothing passions and averting disputes (10). Writing, by contrast, requires leisure, and thus creates a disastrous mismatch between the private time of the individual and the public time of the community: it misses its moment because it ‘has delays which outlive the opportunities’ (μακροτέρους ποιεῖται τοὺς χρόνους τῶν καιρῶν, 10). The Greek deploys the contrast between the two fundamental time-words *khronos* ‘period’/‘duration’/‘passage of time’ and *kairos* ‘moment’/‘opportunity’/‘right time’.

Alcidas illustrates this disjuncture between the time required and the demands of the moment, between time as commodity and time as event, with an arresting image. How absurd it would be if, when the herald in the assembly made the standard invitation ‘which of the citizens wishes to address the meeting?’ – or when the waterclock measuring a litigant’s time in court was already running – the speaker went off to his desk to compose a speech and commit it to memory (11)! This comic scenario then takes a more alarming turn:

Honestly, if we were despots of our own cities, then it would be in our power to summon the courts and initiate debates about public business, and that way, once we had written our speech, we could call the other citizens then to come and listen to them . . . (On Writers 11)

The water-clock is the guarantor of human time, of the autonomy and self-regulation of human affairs;²⁵ in Athens, it represents the provisional quality and fallibility of the decision-making process and the impermanence of democratic judgement itself, but thus also its adaptability and, in the end, the very freedom on which it depends.²⁶ The writer cannot live by the water-clock, cannot adapt his own timing to the community’s; if he is to engage in political life at all, his only option is to make the community’s time his own, with the citizens at his beck and call. There is a pointed contrast between the democratic cry of the herald and the vision of the writer-despot

summoning the city at his own convenience to listen to his compositions. The use of writing as the medium for political discourse triggers an inevitable descent into tyranny.

Alcidamas turns next to what he says is the characteristic style of written speeches.²⁷ Their laborious composition makes them more like products of artifice (*poiēmata*, ‘things made’ but also ‘poems’) than speeches (12); their lack of spontaneity and truth, and their manifest artificiality, inspire disbelief and hostility in an audience. For this reason, he says, writers for the law courts avoid signs of careful composition (*akribeia*) and imitate instead an improvisatory style: ‘they think their writing is at its best when they supply speeches which resemble written ones as little as possible’ (13). The validity of this comment is easy to recognise in the light of, say, the deceptive simplicity and brilliant characterisation found in works such as Lysias 1 *On the Killing of Eratosthenes* – a bravura composition by the acknowledged leading exponent of writing for the lawcourts. It is, however, an admission which creates problems for Alcidamas’ argument. First, it implies an acknowledgement that written speeches *can* reproduce the style of the improviser with a degree of effectiveness, thus partially undermining the claim that an improviser can turn his hand to writing but not vice versa (though of course mimicking an improvised performance in writing is not the same thing as performing it).²⁸ More importantly, though, it creates a fissure in the monolith of ‘writing’ as Alcidamas has thus far portrayed it. His attack on writing has depended, and will continue to depend, on the assumption that writing implies a particular style, characterised by precision (*akribeia*): careful choice of words and polished composition. It is now acknowledged, however, that it is possible to *write* in an improvisatory style. This opens the reader’s eyes to the real-world diversity of the uses of writing (to which we will return in the next section). It also raises the question, how can an audience tell whether or not a written text lies behind the public performance they are hearing? Above all, by allowing a gap to appear between writing as it exists in the real world and writing as it has been represented for purposes of his attack, Alcidamas again alerts the reader to the oddity of what he is doing and to the possibility that the ‘indictment of writing’ is not quite what it seems.

Alcidamas turns next to the effects of writing on the writer himself. Here we find an answer (if not a very satisfactory one) to the question how, when a speech is delivered, an audience will recognise it as *written* not improvised. The game will be given away by those moments when even someone with a written text is forced to improvise: the contrast between prepared and improvised material

will then be evident, and the former will seem like a theatrical performance, while the latter will come across as ‘low and vulgar’ by comparison. This will expose the writer as a palpable fraud. The whole way of life of the writer, torn between scripted and ‘live’ performance, becomes inconsistent and uneven in texture (*anōmalon*, 14).

The damage is not limited to the writer/speaker’s public persona. The slow, minute work of constructing written speeches destroys confidence and saps the mental agility required for improvisation; when he tries to speak, the writer is simply lost for words (15–16). The movements of his mind are as slow and stilted as those of a prisoner newly released from chains (17). Though easy to master, writing in itself is laborious, static and unpleasant, where improvisation is adaptable, fluid and rewarding (18–19); while the improviser can easily cover his tracks and move on if he forgets a point, for the writer the merest slip is a disaster:

... if the slightest bit is left out or altered in the heat of the moment, this inevitably results in helpless confused rambling, long pauses, and often in the speech being broken with silence. This helplessness is unseemly, ridiculous, and hard to remedy.²⁹

Alcidamas now returns to the topic of *kairos*. The speaker, he tells us, can gauge his hearers’ appetite and tailor his speech to an appropriate length; the writer, who has prepared in advance, would need knowledge of the future in order to do the same, and in practice is doomed either to incur hostility by going on too long, or to stop short while there is still an eager audience (22–3). Again, the improviser can easily incorporate points which arise from an opponent’s speech or which occur to him in the heat of the moment. The writer’s precisely crafted text, however, cannot accommodate such windfalls; he must either reject what he is offered by chance, or, by using it, ‘tear apart and bring down in ruins the organisation of his words’ (25) by mixing written and extemporised material together. So where other arts (*tekhnai*) are invented to improve the human condition, writing is one which actually leaves us less well off than if we relied on chance (26).

Written speeches, Alcidamas concludes, are not really speeches at all; rather they are to real speeches as statues and pictures are to living creatures. They may be impressive to contemplate in a book, but in practical situations they are motionless and therefore useless. By contrast,

... a speech spoken from the mind itself on the spur of the moment is alive and

breathing and follows the situation and has the characteristics of real bodies. The written speech, on the other hand, has the character of an image of a speech, and can play no part in beneficial action (28).³⁰

Here the parallels with the episode in Plato's *Phaedrus* discussed above are at their most conspicuous.³¹ In *Phaedrus*, however, the emphasis is on the vulnerability of the written speech, its helplessness to defend itself or to choose its interlocutors; in *On Writers* it is on its passivity and inability to help others.

As he draws to a close, Alcidas brings back into play the fictive legal scenario which was announced, but not developed, at the beginning. He anticipates possible objections to his argument, or, more precisely, possible questions about his own consistency and *bona fides* in presenting such an argument in the first place. This simultaneously reminds the reader what the author initially claimed to be doing (i.e. prosecuting written speeches)³² – thus inviting us to reflect on whether that is what he has actually done – and draws our attention to some reasons for doubting whether he would have set out to do such a thing at all:

Someone might say that it is unreasonable for me to bring charges against the power of writing when I am evidently using it myself to publicise my ideas, and to dismiss out of hand the technique by means of which people seek a reputation throughout Greece; and that it is odd for someone whose profession is philosophy to praise improvised speech, and to regard chance as more profitable than forethought and haphazard speakers as wiser than considered writers.³³

Alcidas recognises two fundamental reasons why his audience (or imagined opponent) might question his sincerity in attacking 'written speeches'. The first is the obvious fact that he composes written speeches himself. The second is his own profession (*tekhnē*), as someone 'dedicated to *philosophia*', i.e. committed to an educational programme based on *logoi*. If the best way to speak is to improvise, why spend time on study at all?³⁴ Or rather: why is Alcidas seeking to destroy the foundations of his own trade and presumably to deprive himself of his own livelihood?

Alcidas' answers to these objections are revealing. He does not reject writing completely; he merely sees it as less valuable than improvisation. Writing has its uses, and these uses fall into two categories. First, it enables someone in his position to target audiences who do not (yet) appreciate the superiority of improvisation: to show rivals who depend on writing that he can easily beat them at their own game (30), and to demonstrate his skill to potential students newly arrived on the educational scene, who are liable to judge his improvised performances by inappropriate criteria (31).³⁵ Secondly,

while improvisation rules in the temporal aspect of the moment (*kairos*), writing is useful for the manipulation of the temporal aspect of duration (*khronos*). With improvisation, it is hard to remember the detail of past performances and thus to judge what progress has been made; writing enables the rhetorician to compare past and present work, providing a mirror for our self-improvement. Moreover, writing enables us to reach into the future as well as the past by leaving a memorial of our achievements, a concession to vanity (32). Finally, the accusation that it is ‘unphilosophical’ to attack writing is based on a misconception: improvisation does not mean speaking ‘at random’.³⁶ Arguments and structure are to be prepared in advance; verbal expression alone should be improvised, because the benefits of responsiveness to the situation (*eukairia*) outweigh those of calculated precision (*akribeia*).

We will return to these modifications of Alcidamas’ position below. It is worth noting, however, just how much Alcidamas concedes to his imagined critic, and how far he retreats from the supposed ‘indictment of written speeches’. Writing is no longer attacked but merely put in second place, and its acknowledged usefulness encompasses the far from negligible realms of competition, self-promotion, intellectual self-knowledge and lasting reputation. Improvisation, meanwhile, is itself redefined, apparently reduced largely to a matter of choice of words: in other words, of style.³⁷

The conclusion of *On Writers*, however, echoes the confident polemical tone of its opening, summarising Alcidamas’ case in a long rhetorical question. Three antitheses between extempore speaker and writer lead up to a list of further benefits of improvisation. Surely, Alcidamas asks, anyone who wants to be a skilled speaker and not just an adequate producer (*poiētēs*) of speeches, who is more concerned with the needs of the occasion (*kairos*) than with precision (*akribeia*), and who wants the goodwill of his audience rather than their resentment, as well as all the other benefits of ease and adaptability which improvisation confers – surely such a person would be right to put all his energies into improvisation, and keep writing for a playful pastime?

A misdirected attack on writing?

The concessions to writing at the end of *On Writers* strongly reinforce the impression created by the misleading label of ‘indictment’ which the text attaches to itself near the beginning, and by the fundamental

paradox of a written *logos* denouncing written *logoi*: namely, that this text cannot be straightforwardly what it seems.

Muir in his introduction to *On Writers* has made the clearest statement of the case for taking the text at face value, as doing exactly what it says. He notes that modern scholars have been ‘cautious and non-committal’ in saying what sort of work this is, and acknowledges that it is hard to classify generically, suggesting that it is an unusual example of a teacher’s ‘public prospectus’ for a course of instruction. He has no doubts, however, as to its fundamental aim:

... The main purpose of *On Writers* is clear: it is intended to convince the reader that an improvised, adaptable speech, tailored to the needs of the occasion and the mood of the audience, is much to be preferred to a speech delivered from and limited by a text.³⁸

In Muir’s view, then, *On Writers* is advice against going into the public arena and performing from a text, and in favour of learning to improvise instead. Clearly this was a *possible* project for Alcidamas’ text. The most obvious targets would be the consultants who provided clients with speeches to use in the courts, ‘logographers’ like Lysias. While we know less than we would like about the service logographers provided for their clients, it is unlikely that they simply handed over finished speeches in writing, like those which entered the ancient book trade and thus the manuscript tradition which has come down to us, and it would be surprising if they took no measures to help their clients avoid some of the pitfalls of performing a text from memory to which Alcidamas draws attention.³⁹ All the same, even if we assume that what a Lysias or an Isaeus supplied was a more open-textured written product, supplemented with various forms of coaching, it is still easy to see that many of Alcidamas’ arguments could hit their mark if aimed at the logography industry: for instance, his points about the labour of memorising a text, the difficulty of responding to unexpected developments, and the danger that a carefully crafted *persona* would fall apart if the litigant was driven to improvise and thus let his mask slip and his real voice and character show through.⁴⁰ The problem is, however, that at *On Writers* 13 Alcidamas draws an explicit contrast between the written speeches which are the objects of his attack and the works of logographers: writers for the courts, he says, imitate improvised verbal expression and avoid precise formulations (instances of *akribeia*). But it is this very precision, *akribeia*, that is one of the defining characteristics of the written speeches attacked in *On Writers* (14, 16, 20, 25, 33).⁴¹

This rift between the precisely-crafted written speeches which bear the brunt of Alcidamas’ attack on the one hand, and logographers’

speeches which seek to hide their written character on the other, has led scholars to explore two related lines of interpretation. One approach takes its lead from the intertextualities between *On Writers* and several works of Isocrates (especially 13 *Against the Sophists*, 10 *Helen*, and 4 *Panegyricus*), combined with Isocrates' frequent use of the noun ἀκρίβεια, 'precision', and its cognates in reference to the polished excellence of his own written compositions.⁴² Perhaps, the argument goes, it is the desire to target his rival Isocrates that leads Alcidas to focus on the precise style of written speeches, even at the expense of weakening his argument by inaccurately presenting *akribeia* as characteristic also of texts written for live performance. The problem is, however, that if *On Writers* is construed primarily as polemic against Isocrates, it is not very effective polemic. Isocrates agrees that *akribeia* is not appropriate to the cut and thrust of live debates; rather, it is what elevates works such as his own to a level above the everyday, and gives them greater value.⁴³ Isocrates, the writer *par excellence*, makes a virtue of his own (alleged) lack of the voice and confidence needed for a political career, and can readily endorse Alcidas' claims about the likely embarrassment of the writer performing before a crowd; he simply would never place himself in such a situation.⁴⁴ Since its attack focuses on writing's shortcomings as a tool for live performance, and concedes the pedagogical value of writing (albeit in an ancillary role), *On Writers* strikes at best a very glancing blow if construed as direct polemic against Isocrates.

The second approach, suggested by Christoph Eucken and developed by Neil O'Sullivan in his 1992 study *Alcidas, Aristophanes and the Beginnings of Greek Stylistic Theory*, focuses on Alcidas' preoccupation with the style of the written texts he targets, in particular their precision, *akribeia*.⁴⁵ Eucken describes the attack on writing in *On Writers* as primarily an attack on a particular style.⁴⁶ O'Sullivan both qualifies this claim and develops it. While acknowledging that 'Alcidas' concern is not *primarily* with style' (emphasis added), he argues for an interpretation of *On Writers* as a significant contribution to an ongoing stylistic debate. He argues that Alcidas' attack on *akribeia* articulates a theoretical distinction between 'written' and 'spoken' styles (the quotation marks are O'Sullivan's, warning that these terms are 'purely nominal designations, indicating tendency rather than method of presentation': Alcidas *associates* one style with writing and the other with speaking, but it is quite possible to write in a 'spoken' style or speak in a 'written' style). The main target, once again, is Isocrates, and in the contrast Alcidas draws between Isocrates' careful compositions and

the freer style of the improviser, as well as in the actual styles of the two writers, and in Isocrates' observations about his own practice, O'Sullivan discerns an early stage in the development of the distinction in later stylistic theory between the plain style and the grand, *genus tenue* and *genus grande*.⁴⁷

The criticisms of written *akribeia* in *On Writers* fit well within O'Sullivan's wider argument about the germs of Greek stylistic theory, but, as he admits, this context does not suffice to explain the purpose of *On Writers* itself. As has been seen, O'Sullivan accepts that style is not Alcidamas' primary concern. He regards Eucken's view that the attack on writing is essentially an attack on style as exaggerated, pointing to passages which celebrate non-stylistic advantages of improvisation (9–10, 22–3: O'Sullivan 1992: 43 n.104). He does not, however, venture an opinion on what the aim of the attack on writing in *On Writers* actually is. If Alcidamas' main point is that there is such a thing as a 'written' style which is not suitable for live, competitive situations, it is not clear why he considers this a point worth making, or chooses to make it in such a roundabout way.⁴⁸ Why Alcidamas chooses to attack written texts for their shortcomings in live debates, while targeting texts clearly not meant for such debates, remains a puzzle.

It is useful at this point to consider a possible spectrum of real-world speechmaking in a fourth-century bc Greek city such as Athens. At one end there are (1) laboriously composed, carefully crafted written speeches such as Isocrates' *Panegyricus*, characterised by *akribeia* and not designed for agonistic performance; then (2) written speeches such as those to which Alcidamas alludes at *On Writers* 13, written for the courts and other agonistic situations, avoiding *akribeia* and instead cultivating the appearance of spontaneity and what O'Sullivan terms a 'spoken' style, e.g. the works of Lysias and other logographers. Next, these two varieties of written speech in their moments of oral delivery: (3) the polished (*akribēs*) speech read out amongst a group of friends or pupils,⁴⁹ or possibly on a great public occasion such as a Panhellenic festival, but certainly not in a live debate, and (4) the simpler logographer's text performed from memory in an agonistic situation, in a court or possibly the assembly, either verbatim or (more likely) with some degree of improvisatory adaptation to suit the needs of the moment. Then we cross the divide from writing to improvisation with (5) improvisation in an agonistic setting informed by teaching such as Alcidamas offers, based on arguments and structure prepared in advance (*On Writers* 33), but not on a written text. After this come (6) the 'natural' improvisation of someone who combines a gift for speaking (natural ability, *phusis*)

with a degree of experience (practice, *meletē*) but does not have formal training (*tekhnē*), and finally (7) the lowest level of improvisation, simply saying what comes into one's head or speaking 'at random' (εἰκῆ), from which Alcidas differentiates his own model of improvisation at *On Writers* 33.

On this spectrum, most speech in the democratic arena was presumably a mixture of (4), (5), (6) and (7). An 'indictment of written speeches' ought to target any or all of (1) to (4). For Alcidas as champion of (5), the obvious targets to attack would be (1), furthest removed from his own practice, or (4), his most direct competitor. Instead he chooses to target a curious hybrid of them both: an imaginary use of writing which drags written compositions composed with *akribeia* into agonistic situations for which they are not designed. It is not surprising, of course, to find distortion in a polemical text; but here the distortion appears to weaken the polemic, and thus demands a reassessment of the polemic itself. What are the advantages of presenting such an unrealistic picture?

The two faces of the writer

To answer this question, we need to return to the fundamental principles examined at the beginning of this book. It is a presumption of democracy that rule by the people is possible and thus that the people have, or can have, whatever it takes to rule. On the other hand, wherever there are competing models of political education, each is likely to promise that its pupils will acquire advantages over others in exercising their political role. To this extent, such education places itself at odds with democracy. Now, one thing that is generally agreed about *On Writers* is that it aims to advertise Alcidas' educational programme and to recruit pupils (cf. *On Writers* 31), who will learn to improvise effectively and thus to succeed in political situations where others do not.⁵⁰ Alcidas thus faces a difficulty in selling his programme of education to a democratic public. In fact, he faces a double challenge: he must persuade prospective clients simultaneously that what he has to offer them is something of great value, worth spending time on (and paying for), and that it is really doing no more than bringing out the best in them, reinforcing, rather than supplanting, their innate political competence as citizens.

There is a hint of the second challenge when, at *On Writers* 29, Alcidas acknowledges that people may think it odd for an educator to advocate improvisation. In fifth- and fourth-century usage, while

the term ‘improvisation’ (the Greek verb *autoskhediazein* and its cognates) is occasionally applied positively to quick thinking in difficult situations,⁵¹ it far more often denotes artless or unthinking speech:⁵² in terms of the spectrum of *logoi* laid out in the previous section, it is closer to (7) than to (5) or (6). Worse still, in Plato in particular the word sometimes suggests not merely disordered speech, but speech which lacks any basis in knowledge: ‘making it up as you go along’, so, in effect, lying;⁵³ *Phaedrus* 236d, quoted at the start of this chapter, is an apposite example.⁵⁴ Improvisation is the hallmark of someone who is untrained, unprepared, unprofessional. It characterises the *idiōtēs*, the private citizen, in the sense precisely of someone lacking political expertise.⁵⁵ Thus Alcidas needs simultaneously to argue for improvisation as a serious educational programme, rather than a concomitant of ignorance and incompetence or, at best, a last-ditch expedient in emergencies, and to present this educational programme as one which is in sympathy with, and at the service of, the democracy, not a threat to the autonomy and authority of its citizens. It is to these ends that the ambivalent figure of the writer is pressed into service.

The writer as characterised in *On Writers* is an odd, composite creature, rather like a monster of myth. On the one hand, he is addicted to verbal precision (*akribēia*), a devotee of advance preparation over the long duration of commoditised time (*khronos*). On the other, he is a would-be live performer, trying to make his way in the real-time world of political events (*kairos*). Not surprisingly, then, the writer presents us with not one face, but two.

First, there is the writer as artist (*poiētēs*) of written speeches, piecing his work laboriously together, borrowing other writers’ ideas, seeking advice wherever he can get it, struggling to memorise what he has written, condemned to a job which, while undemanding, is slow and tedious (4, 10). He is at once a contemptible hack and a pitiable drudge. When he tries to perform in public, he is hopelessly out of place, and becomes a figure of fun: he forgets his text, throws his whole speech into confusion by attempting to cover gaps with incompetent improvisation. He cannot relate to his audience and respond to their moods; nor can he follow the debate and respond to questions (14, 16, 21–2).

Alongside this image of the writer as (possibly harmless) buffoon, however, we are presented with a more sinister figure. This more threatening writer is prefigured in Alcidas’ opening sentence, where the incompetence of the unnamed objects of his criticism is matched by their conceit: they are self-important and arrogant, laying

unjustified claim to the whole power of rhetoric (1). It soon becomes clear that the writer's darker side is not merely unpleasantly self-regarding, but positively antisocial. Incompetence as a performer leads to a withdrawn unreadiness to participate or engage positively in the life of the community. When public life requires his contribution, the speaker rises to the occasion and wins honour; the writer, by contrast, remains silent (9). The speaker brings prompt help to his fellow citizens in time of need; the writer is too slow to be of use (10).

This picture becomes most vivid and most disturbing when the writer is confronted with the core institution of the democratic city, the Assembly, and the herald's invitation 'which of the citizens wishes to speak?' The writer needs time to prepare his text; his leisure takes priority over the immediate needs of the community, as extended time (*khnronos*) displaces the demands of the here-and-now (*kairos*). The only way he can participate effectively in public affairs is by having his fellow-citizens at his beck and call – by becoming a tyrant (11). The writer emerges as alienated from his fellow citizens and from human society itself. In contrast with the verity and spontaneity of speech, writing arouses distrust and resentment (12). When the writer loses his thread, he is an object of laughter, inaccessible to help, cut off from the community.⁵⁶ The performance of a written speech is conspicuously artificial, like acting or recital (13): political performance becomes stylised, just as political speech is drawn into the artificial elevated registers of poetry. Writing makes a prisoner of the soul (17); the writer may be like a tyrant or like a captive – anything but a free citizen.

Seen against the background of the public sphere and its demand for live performance, the writer and his text are on the one hand an absurdity, lifeless, unable to help themselves or others, and, on the other hand, self-regarding, aloof, arrogant in their detachment from the community, even tyrannical. Alcidas uses these twin imaginary figures of the writer as rhetorical foils to define and promote his vision of the improvisatory speaker in a way that relieves the tension between the premises of democracy and the claims of political education. By contrast with the writer in both his guises, the improviser is pre-eminently at home in the public sphere and in the give and take of live debate. His preparation, the learning of key types of argument, is straightforward (a selling-point for prospective pupils); his great power is in his ability to ride the current of debate, to reply to other speakers, gauge the mood of his listeners, respond to *kairos*, opportunity, and take advantage of whatever chance may offer. Thus his expertise is represented as democratic (or popular):⁵⁷ his political authority emerges from his relationship with his fellows and his

responsiveness to the *kairoi* generated by their needs and moods; it is almost an emanation of the social or political situation itself.

This is Alcidas' response to the problem of marketing political education in a context of democratic ideology. The figure of the writer also helps him with the second problem, that of promoting improvisation in particular as his educational programme. In between the mute poet-writer who goes to pieces in situations of live debate (who is in a worse position than an *idiōtēs* in that he cannot deploy even natural competence), and the controlling tyrant-writer who threatens to usurp control of the political process, Alcidas positions the improviser as a specialist whose specialism arises from the normal activity of court and assembly, someone who simply represents the best of what the *dēmos* already is.

Faced with a similar difficulty, Isocrates exploits different senses of the Greek word *philosophia*, including general cultivation of the mind, his own chosen activity of composing refined speeches on political subjects in writing, and philosophy as understood by Plato, in order to advertise his own programme of education. He contrasts his own work both with the cheap routes to success which, he claims, are offered by other teachers, and with Plato's otherworldly abstractions. He casts his own *philosophia* as more perfect and more powerful than any other educational system, and yet at the same time grounded in common sense and tradition, a kind of distillate of the wisdom of the democratic city.⁵⁸ Alcidas, I suggest, uses the contrast between writing and improvisation in a very similar way. Both teachers deploy what we might call an educational 'sophistry of anti-sophistry', analogous to the 'rhetoric of anti-rhetoric' in the courts and assembly, in order to cast themselves as experts for the democracy. The crucial difference is that where Isocrates, in the process, must reinvent politics in a fictive textual form, Alcidas continues to give ultimate priority to the live political debate. This is, of course, one reason why we know so much more about Isocrates than about Alcidas; but it makes *On Writers* all the more interesting as a rare document of practically minded Greek political education.

Stylish spontaneity

Alcidas uses the formal, polished, precise style of (some) written speeches as a foil to the free, fluid, responsive style of the improvisatory political performer. This representation of political practice in stylistic terms may be further illuminated by reference to

the aesthetic typology of political action outlined by Robert Hariman in his book *Political Style*. Hariman defines a political style as

... (1) a set of rules for speech and conduct guiding the alignment of signs and situations, or texts and acts, or behavior and place; (2) informing practices of communication and display; (3) operating through a repertoire of rhetorical conventions depending on aesthetic reactions; and (4) determining individual identity, providing social cohesion, and distributing power.⁵⁹

Hariman's aim is to find language to describe and interpret the *art* of politics, the outward forms which shape and structure political action and make it familiar and intelligible to those who participate. In doing so, he draws explicitly on classical rhetoric, in particular the theory of decorum, τὸ πρέπον (180–82). He develops his (exploratory and incomplete) account of political styles in four chapters, each of which analyses the rhetorical tropes of an emblematic text.⁶⁰

The 'realist' style is represented by Machiavelli's *The Prince*, a text which makes a self-conscious break with the rhetorical tradition from which it emerges, disingenuously professing itself to be unrhetorical. *The Prince* posits a hierarchical opposition between words and forces, speech and action. It uses visual and spatial imagery to articulate its ideal of clear-sighted, disillusioned strategic thinking, in which rhetoric, and indeed language, is superfluous or even obstructive because the play of forces is manifest (Hariman 1995: 23–6, 29–30, 34–7). Realist political texts assert their authority vis-à-vis other texts by pointing to an autonomous realm of power which is extra-textual, but do so at the cost of drawing attention to their own incompleteness (44–9).

Ryszard Kapuściński's *The Emperor* provides the model for the 'courtly' style. Haile Selassie's court as evoked by Kapuściński is an elaborate hierarchy which simultaneously generates stability and instability, as all the functionaries from highest to lowest both know their place, and compete frenetically to maintain and improve it (55–7). The physical person of the Emperor embodies the discipline which this hierarchy imposes on material nature. The imperial body validates the status of everyone else in the hierarchy, status which finds physical expression in their proximity to him in the entourage, and their level of access to his presence. The favoured medium for such access is direct oral communication, the word in the ear; the Emperor himself, however, speaks little, asserting authority through the steady gaze (58–60, 62–4). At the same time, his power is constituted by the performance which surrounds him, and the concentration of authority in his body is a symbol of its diffusion through the hierarchy and beyond (71–3); he and his courtiers have a

reciprocal role as audience and performers in a court drama which depends on them both for its significance. The stylistic aspect of power is accentuated, and the result is to highlight the arbitrariness and elusiveness of power itself. Hariman suggests the culture of celebrity, in which mass attention both creates and feeds on the glamour of the star, as a modern analogue of the courtly style (79–94).

For the ‘republican’ style, Hariman turns to Cicero’s correspondence with his friend Atticus. The republican style is characterised by the central importance accorded to rhetorical persuasion and to the relationship between the individual politician, as persuasive speaker, and his audience (102–10). The republican politician is acutely aware that the republic itself is held together by relationships of persuasion; consequently, it is vital always to have something to say, to keep the conversation going. Political speech rules, with other linguistic forms (poetry, history, etc.) ancillary to it; silence is to be avoided (112). In maintaining the cohesion of the republic, alongside the binary relationship between orator and audience goes the more complex business of forging alliances, following trends and finding consensus (113–15). Republican politics is both personal and public, played out between highly wrought public personae, and can lead, as perhaps in Cicero’s case, to excessive and delusional self-identification with the state and its interests (115–22).

The ‘bureaucratic’ style is represented by a reading of Kafka’s *The Castle*. The bureaucratic condition as experienced by the character K. in the village below the mysterious castle is one of being not at home but a ‘boarder’, observing the surface of what happens while remaining distanced from its significance, so that action becomes gesture (142–5). The bureaucratic style, like the courtly, is characterised by an elaborate hierarchy, but while in that case the hierarchy was sustained by the central person of the monarch, here persons are subordinated to officials, and officials in turn to the offices they hold (148–9). Officials acquire authority not from a human source, but from the hierarchy itself (which ramifies to unseen heights and depths), and from the volume of their work and their dedication to it. This work is focused on venerated written documents, which in turn refer to and generate further documents (154–67). Banality, shoddiness and even chaos in the physical manifestations of bureaucratic hierarchy only add to the mystique of the hierarchy itself (145–6, 151–2, 163–5). This is a world of deferral, in which office reports to office, procedures lead to further procedures, documents index other documents. Knowledge is understood to be power, but it is a power which binds the knower to the bureaucratic structure,

something which even K., as the amused outsider, cannot escape (146–7, 151–3). Hariman concludes his discussion of the bureaucratic style by turning from *The Castle* to the celebrated story ‘Before the Law’, told to K. by the priest near the end of *The Trial*, and K.’s ensuing conversation with the priest about the story’s interpretation.⁶¹ Hariman suggests that Kafka presents deliberate refusal of (bureaucratic) knowledge as the only means of escape, the only possible route to real power and agency: ‘action requires a higher form of ignorance’ (175).

Hariman’s analysis of these political styles, each with its own distinctive attitude to text, speech, and silence, provides a useful interpretive model for Alcidas’ *On Written Speeches*, with its knowingly paradoxical attack on written texts and its clear yet unrealistic deployment of an opposition between two different (literary) styles. Alcidas’ attack on writing is ineffective on a practical political level, because the precisely crafted texts he attacks were never meant to be used in the way he suggests. It is no more effective on literary style, because it lacks a target: a writer such as Isocrates can readily agree that there are different levels of style and that his own work is suitable for grander occasions,⁶² and in any case Alcidas himself admits that he uses the ‘written’ as well as the improvisatory style. It is effective, on the other hand, in articulating and promoting a particular political style. *On Writers* presents us with a vision at once witty and polemical of two opposing models of political engagement, two contrasting ways of being an artist of political discourse, and of what sort of life-choice each career would represent.

The writer of speeches boasts without substance, and does easy but tiresome work for little reward (1–4, 18–19). In public he is marked by embarrassment, perplexity (*aporia*) in the face of the needs of the occasion (*kairos*), and especially by silence.⁶³ He cannot help others, lacking the psychagogic power of speech which enables the improviser to respond to the moods of his fellow citizens (10). Worse still, he cannot receive help either, from his own works (28), from others (21), or even from chance (26). He is isolated, most at home in private at his desk; he is like a prisoner (17), and could exercise political authority only on terms of becoming a despot (11).

By contrast, the improviser is adaptable (and could indeed be an excellent writer if he wanted (8). He is at home in the public sphere; his ability and education make him responsive to the demands of the situation and to the moods and needs of his fellow citizens (3, 10), and they reward him by honouring him almost as a god (9). By

contrast with the writer, surrounded by his spiritless creations, it is human life that is his concern (9); he is quick and eager to help.⁶⁴ If he forgets something, he recovers without embarrassment; if an opportunity presents itself, he grasps it easily (20, 24). He is represented as an agile hands-on practitioner, someone who engages closely but is also flexible and quick to move from one task to another;⁶⁵ he is fluid where the writer is dry;⁶⁶ he has a ready supply of words which reach their target by identifying and meeting the needs of the audience, he has their interests at heart, and consequently their goodwill on his side.⁶⁷ The essence of his political style is responsiveness to *kairos*, and because for Alcidas *kairos* is a concept which reaches beyond the speech itself to the practical situation within which it is given,⁶⁸ this makes him the perfect democratic rhetorician: a political expert whose expertise does not set him apart from, or above, the political community, because it is rooted in the community itself. The improviser derives his authority from his ability to discern, and respond to, the needs of his fellow citizens.

Alcidas' representation of the improviser satisfies Hariman's four-point definition of political style. First, the improviser has a repertoire or arguments and a knowledge of *dispositio*, how to structure a speech, but he responds to *kairos* and chooses specific material, and words especially, on the spur of the moment, without excessive fussiness or precision. He uses writing as well, but in an auxiliary role. Second, his training enables him to rise to the occasion in all the exigencies of human life, serving his fellow citizens, holding their attention and winning their esteem. Third, his style of speech projects spontaneity and honesty, by contrast with the artificiality of the 'written' style; his attention to *kairos* enables him to respond to his audience's appetites and win their goodwill. Finally, his skill establishes his identity as an able speaker (or politician, *rhētōr*) as opposed to a mere manufacturer of speeches. It enables him to engage closely with his fellow citizens, to participate in collective decision-making, and to acquire authority founded on their support.

The writer's style is in some ways close to the courtly style. Like the monarch, the writer is an aloof figure who subordinates the other citizens to himself, expecting them to take their timing from him. The movements of writing are artificial and formalised, and the written speech itself is an object to be gazed at, producing awe (*ekplēxis*) without actually doing anything useful.⁶⁹ On the other hand, writing's effects of 'deferral' (replacing speeches with imitations of speeches, and requiring time which extends beyond the occasion), its fetishising of fixed, precise form, and its cramped conventions which fill the

onlooker with distrust and resentment (12) connect it with the bureaucratic style. The opposition between duration (*khronos*) and occasion (*kairos*) is the key to the relationship between writing and improvisation: writing is delay, improvisation is action; writing belongs to the leisured individual, improvisation to the collective.

The improvisatory style has affinities with the realist style in that it promises a direct, practical response to forces in the world taken to be manifest, in this case the demands of *kairos*; it differs in that it assimilates speech to action instead of placing the two in opposition. Its ideal of abundant speech (*euporia*), and its focus on the relationship between speaker and audience, recall Hariman's republican style, but there are important differences. First, the emphasis is not on *persuading* the audience, but rather on recognising and, where necessary, moderating their emotions, responding to their desires, meeting their needs, and providing them with assistance. As a result, and in spite of the fact that the improviser's exceptional ability and training and the honour he receives for his 'godlike intellect' (*On Writers* 3, 9), the relationship between speaker and audience appears more egalitarian than hierarchical. The speaker himself has a style, but does not acquire a definite personality; nor, indeed does the community in which he operates.⁷⁰ By contrast with the republican style, where the orator stands for the republic, self-consciously constructs a public persona, and comes to identify with the republic itself, the setting for the improviser's eloquence is 'human life',⁷¹ a communal domain with no discernible hierarchy, in which interpersonal and political eloquence are part of a continuum.⁷² We have returned to the stage set by Solon: a stage for interchanging rather than dominant performance, for collective rather than individual authority, for democracy as opposed to statesmanship. It offers a model of political action which suits the 'free spaces' in Athenian democracy: spaces such as the tavern, trireme, shop, or agora, where public and private intersect, and where people of different gender and status interact with consequent blurring of identities.⁷³ *On Writers* casts the improviser as a political agent ideally equipped to operate in such free spaces.

Among the lost works of Alcidas was a version of the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod*, our surviving text of which dates from the second century ad, but which may have its origins in a tradition going back earlier than the fourth century bc.⁷⁴ Alcidas' contest-story probably formed part of a larger work or compilation which was known as the *Mouseion* or 'shrine of the Muses' (Μουσείον: Latin *Museum*). A large part of the surviving *Contest* consists of Hesiod presenting Homer with riddling or paradoxical verses which Homer 'caps' with wittily

improvised lines of his own. Unfortunately neither the *Mouseion* nor the original *Contest* can be reconstructed with any confidence,⁷⁵ but the contest-story was another excellent opportunity to display the improvisatory style at work. Alcidas' contemporary Isocrates developed a form of political discourse to which he gave the name of *philosophia*, and which he presented as essentially the distilled, refined and perfectly finished practical wisdom of the Athenian *demos* itself.⁷⁶ This is Isocrates' distinctive solution to the problem of competitive teaching of political expertise within democracy: all he is doing, he claims, is re-presenting to the democracy the essence of its own true excellence. Alcidas in *On Writers* provides a different solution to the same problem, and, though this comes as a surprise in a text which at first seems paradoxical and unrealistic, his vision of political education remains much closer to the practice of politics. The wisdom of the *dēmos* does not need to be distilled, refined, or elaborated by leisured experts: in fact, by doing so they destroy it and replace it with a hideous tyrannical parody of itself. Instead, he reacts against the development of a written political discourse which prides itself aesthetically on being aloof from the noise and unpredictability of the public sphere. Alcidas reasserts the pre-eminence of politics as live human interaction, arguing that in real-life situations it is adaptability and responsiveness to others (*eukairia*), rather than fixity and precision (*akribēia*), that is conducive to political success. He asserts the aesthetic and ethical appeal of a pragmatic political style with a fundamentally democratic orientation.

In a famous image in the *Republic* (493a–c), Plato's Socrates likens sophistic teachers to the keepers of a powerful beast, who boast of their wisdom because they have learned how to tend to its moods and appetites, though of course they have no more idea what is genuinely good for it than does the beast itself. Alcidas' picture of the improviser, attentive to the moods, emotions and needs of his audience, adaptable and assiduous in his desire to give the people what they want, captures the same situation from a radically different perspective. From this perspective, the animal is human, not sub-human, and its multiplicity is inclusive rather than monstrous. The political agent neither panders to its demands in uncomprehending manipulative co-dependency, like Plato's 'sophist', nor looks down on them with the amused contempt of superior knowledge, like Plato's philosopher, but responds to them on a basis of identification. The improviser's performance is a projection of the collective will of the audience; the improviser's political authority is a function of membership of the people, one and many, whose shared deliberation the improvisation enacts.

In spite of the over-representation of texts from democratic Athens in surviving Greek literature, works discussing politics from any theoretical perspective come overwhelmingly from writers critical of, if not downright hostile to, democracy. This may be, as Josiah Ober has argued, because it was a spirit of dissent which provided much of the impetus to explore fundamental questions of political principle.⁷⁷ Alcidas is the exception, and this makes his work particularly important. Unlike many of the critics of democracy, he is not an Athenian but an outsider. The city of *On Writers* is not explicitly identified as Athens; while certainly not a tyranny, it is not even explicitly identified as a democracy, and there would be a place for the improviser's skills in any political system where debates engaging a large audience are integral to the process of government. Yet Alcidas' vision of political authority and political agency is clearly shaped by the democratic city; his improvisatory speaker is equipped above all to occupy the stage set by Solon. *On Writers* is unique in articulating a model of political action distinctively appropriate to the citizen performers of democratic Athens.

Notes

- 1 ἄλλ', ὦ μακάριε Φαίδρε, γελοῖος ἔσομαι παρ' ἀγαθὸν ποιητὴν ιδιώτης αὐτοσχεδιάζων περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν . . .
- 2 Hesk 2000: 202–41.
- 3 Cf. LSJ παρασκευή I.3 'intrigue, cabal for the purpose of gaining a verdict or carrying a measure'. The *topos* of referring to such preparations in the prologue to a speech was familiar enough to be parodied in a speech in his own defence made by the comic playwright Kratinos, acting as 'himself' in his mock-autobiographical play *The Wine Bottle* (*Pytine*, 425 BC), F 197: τὴν μὲν παρασκευὴν ἴσως γινώσκετε 'perhaps you know about the preparations . . .'. The joke is all the more effective because here the 'preparations' of his enemies – allegations of alcoholism – are being defused by being turned into 'preparations', a 'plot' in both sense in English, of Kratinos' own.
- 4 The manuscript title is περὶ τῶν τοῦς γραπτὸὺς λόγους γραφόντων ἢ περὶ σοφιστῶν, 'on those who write written speeches [*logoi*] or on sophists', but the speaker effectively 'names' the work in his first sentence as a κατηγορία τῶν γραπτῶν λόγων, 'indictment of written speeches'.
- 5 A telling development is the creation of the public archive in the Metroön in the late fifth century (Thomas 1989: 38–40), partly of course to store written documents already in existence (see Sickinger 1994: 294 f. on recording and publication process), but also as a response to growing demand for such storage as the city becomes more 'document-minded' (Thomas 1992: 96). After the Peloponnesian War, the restored democracy resumed the process, begun in 410 bc, of copying and compiling the city's laws and sacrificial calendar (see Robertson 1990, Gawlinski 2007).
- 6 See e.g. the essays in Yunis 2003.

- 7 See Steiner 1994 (166–9 on the *Suppliants* passage), with the qualifications set out in Cole 1996.
- 8 On the significance of this much-discussed passage for the interpretation of Plato's dialogues, see e.g. Nightingale 1995: 148–71.
- 9 For a concise account of Alcidas' career, see Edwards 2007.
- 10 Evidence in Muir 2001: v–vi, Mariß 2002: 15–18.
- 11 ἔλευθέρους ἀφῆκε πάντας θεός· οὐδένα δοῦλον ἢ φύσις πεποίηκεν, *Messeniakos* F 3 Avezzù (Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1373b18).
- 12 In my view, it is probable that Plato was familiar with *On Writers* at the time when he wrote the *Phaedrus*, or this part of it: see Avezzù 1982: 71–2, Mariß 2002: 56–63 (with further references to the long-running debate); *contra*, e.g. Muir 2001: 14. Since, however, neither work can be dated securely and all similarities between the two are open to a variety of interpretations, certainty on this question is impossible.
- 13 On Alcidas and Isocrates, see Mariß 2002: 26–55. On scholarly neglect of *On Writers*, see e.g. O'Sullivan 1992: 23; E. Hall 2006: 357 ('for centuries extraordinarily overlooked by historians both of Athens and of rhetoric'); Cole 1996: 147.
- 14 Following Mariß and other editors in adopting Sauppe's conjecture *θυμωμένων*. The MS reading is *ἀπολλυμένων* 'victims of destruction'; Radermacher opts for *ἀπονοουμένων* 'insane' or 'frenzied'.
- 15 Text problematic and possibly corrupt: see Mariß 2002: 247 f.
- 16 I.e., their previous educational experience has been of *epideixeis* prepared in writing, not of improvisation. This is Mariß's interpretation. Blass interprets 'lectures' not as 'our lectures' but as 'other people's lectures' (writing 'sc. τῶν ἄλλων' after τὰς ἀκροάσεις in his apparatus) and sees this as a reference to those who attend *lectures* (in general) rarely, and have not heard Alcidas before.
- 17 E.g., excessive promises, and specialists vs *idiōtai*: Isocrates 13 *Against the Sophists* 1, Xenophon *Cynegeticus* 13.1–9; dismissive anonymity (τινες): Isocrates 10 *Helen* 1, and cf. the opening of the Hippocratic treatise *On the Art*: 'there are some people who have made an art (*tekhnē*) of slandering the arts . . . ' See further Avezzù 1982: 74, Mariß 2002: 80–90, and especially Demont 1993: 206.
- 18 On these sophistic 'trials at Troy', see the excellent recent study of Knudsen 2012. Gorgias' *Palamedes* has the hero defending himself on a charge of treason. A corresponding case for the prosecution is contained in the speech *Odysseus*, whose traditional attribution to Alcidas has been alternately questioned and defended in modern scholarship: see the review of the question in Mariß 2002: 18–20. O'Sullivan 2008 against Alcidas' authorship on grounds of linguistic anomalies, but these are not as conclusive as he suggests, nor does the later date he proposes provide them with a satisfactory solution. Knudsen notes O'Sullivan's arguments but accepts the traditional attribution to Alcidas (Knudsen 2012: 43). Antisthenes' *Ajax* and *Odysseus* present the two heroes' opposing claims to the armour of Achilles after his death. Such speeches represent a sub-genre of the genre of 'mythological epideictic' which also included Prodikos' *Choice of Heracles* (84 B 2), Gorgias' *Helen*, and Isocrates' speeches celebrating the mythological characters Helen of Troy and Busiris of Egypt (Isocrates 10 *Helen* and 11 *Busiris*).
- 19 Paradoxical rhetoric most often took the form of praise of 'inglorious' subjects (ἄδοξα), but this could easily shade into denigration of things usually

celebrated; Polykrates of Athens' *Indictment of Socrates* may have been an example. See Isocrates 10 *Helen* 12; Pease 1926; Livingstone 2001: 28 f., and 32–9 on the *Indictment of Socrates*. Alcidas himself is reported to have written a *Praise of Death* (Pease 1926: 29 with n. 6), but it is far from clear what this work was (if it existed at all). The genre continued to be popular after the classical period: see especially the fourth–fifth-century philosopher and rhetor Synesios of Cyrene's *Praise of Baldness*, which presents itself as a reply to his distinguished predecessor Dion of Prousa's *Praise of Hair* (on which see Aujoulat and Lamoureux 2004: 10–13 (on the genre and the question of its relationship to Cynic diatribe), 29–32 (on the relationship between Synesios' work and Dion's)).

- 20 Cf. Muir 2001: xiii; in spite of the arguments of Mariß 2002: 93, the fact that Alcidas presents proofs and anticipates objections is not enough to sustain the fiction of a legal speech. Alcidas' mis-description of his text may be compared with the last words of Gorgias' *Helen*: 'an encomium of Helen, but a plaything of my own', of which Isocrates complains that 'he claims to have written a praise speech about her, but in fact he has delivered a speech in defence of her conduct' (10 *Helen* 12). Gorgias' mis-description is perhaps an ironic acknowledgement that the primary subject of the composition is not Helen, but the power of (Gorgianic) rhetoric itself.
- 21 *On Writers* 2 ἀπολελειφθαι πολὺ καὶ ῥητορικῆς καὶ φιλοσοφίας ὑπελιηφώς.
- 22 Various identified as 'improvisation' (αὐτοσχεδιάζειν), 'speaking on the spur of the moment' (λέγειν ἐκ τοῦ παραυτίκα), or simply 'speaking' (λέγειν).
- 23 Literally 'by re-patterning a little the disposition of their soul' (μικρόν τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἔξιν μεταρρυθμίσαντες), a good example of the type of florid locution for which Aristotle criticises Alcidas in *Rhetoric* 3.3. On Alcidas' style, see O'Sullivan 1992: 32–42.
- 24 The Greek word *kairos* is notoriously hard to translate (J. de Romilly in Trédé 1992: 8–9); it can indicate the required measure of something, or the point of coincidence between two things, either in time or in space; see J.R. Wilson 1981 for a survey of examples (carried out without the benefit of modern search technology) and Trédé 1992 for detailed discussion. In *On Writers*, *kairos* directs focus onto the dynamic and changing demands of the situation, which in turn are a function of the performative engagement of all participants: see below. On *kairos* in earlier Greek rhetoric, see Trédé 1992: 247–53, and on *kairos* in Alcidas, 255–60.
- 25 D.S. Allen 2003.
- 26 'By limiting the amount of time allowed a trial, the Athenians were accepting that judgements would be incomplete, imperfect; they were accepting the principle of the fallibility of human judgement. A tyrant claiming absolute wisdom needs no water-clock. He gives the answer when "he knows". Once having accepted the fallibility of human judgement, the Athenians had in the time-limits a method of providing themselves with judgement of consistent quality. Thus, the democratic nature of the Athenian distribution of time and judgement did not lie primarily in the equality of the portions of water but rather in the acceptance of fallibility' (D.S. Allen 1996: 159).
- 27 The connection of ideas at this point in *On Writers* is slightly obscured by problems of textual transmission: see Mariß 2002: 176 f., 179. The work is in general rather loosely structured, perhaps to exemplify what it advocates by avoiding excessive precision (ἀκριβεία): see e.g. O'Sullivan 1992: 41 (with n.

98), 60. Mariß's section-by-section analysis of the work underlines this point (2002: 65–8).

- 28 Cf. Alcidas' description of written texts as 'imitations of speeches' in 27. See below for further discussion of the various 'points on the scale' from writing to improvisation.
- 29 ἀνάγκη . . . ἀσχήμονα . . . καὶ καταγέλαστον καὶ δυσεπικούρητον καθεστάναι τὴν ἀπορίαν, 21.
- 30 Preserving the MS reading εὐεργεσίας. Muir 2001 follows earlier editors in adopting Reiske's conjecture ἐνεργείας; *contra*, Mariß 2002: 279 f., following Avezzù 1982.
- 31 There is a particular striking parallel between *On Writers* 28 'it is animate (*empsykhos*) and lives . . . whereas the written *logos*, possessing a nature like that of an image (*eikōn*) . . . ' (ἐμψυχός ἐστι καὶ ζῆ . . . ὁ δὲ γεγραμμένος εἰκὼνι λόγου τὴν φύσιν ὁμοίαν ἔχων) and *Phaedrus* 276a 'you mean the living and animate (*empsykhos*) *logos* of the knower, of which the written *logos* could rightly be called a kind of image (*eidōlon*)' (τὸν τοῦ εἰδότος λόγον λέγεις ζῶντα καὶ ἐμψυχον, οὗ ὁ γεγραμμένος εἰδῶλον ἂν τι λέγοιτο δικαίως). For an overview of discussions, see Mariß 2002: 56–63. The resemblances are close enough to make a relationship of influence seem likely, and while confidence is impossible, it seems more plausible that Plato adopted and developed one of Alcidas' most striking images than that Alcidas cherry-picked one of Plato's in order to use it in a derivative way at a climactic point in his text. *Phaedrus* similarly adopts and develops ideas adumbrated in another polemical pamphlet, *Isocrates' Busiris*: see Livingstone 2001: 56–66.
- 32 κατηγορεῖν . . . τῆς γραφικῆς δυνάμεως, 29: the formal language of prosecution reappears for the first time since the introduction. Note also προδιαβάλλειν below ('Mit dem Verb spielt Alkidamas erneut auf den Entwurf seiner Rede als eine Anklage an': Mariß 2002: 284). The legalistic tone continues with ἀποδοκιμάζων in 30, cf. Mariß 2002: 289.
- 33 *On Writers* 29, adopting Bakker's conjecture ἐπιδείξεις for MS ἀποδείξεις: see Mariß 2002: 281–2.
- 34 Mariß 2002: 280 lists five anticipated objections: 1. Alcidas' own use of writing, 2. the fact that writing is a means to renown, 3. that as an educator he commends improvised speeches, 4. that he values chance above preparation, and 5. that he thinks off-the-cuff speakers wiser than writers with preparation. Alcidas' paratactic style here with repeated use of καὶ does give the impression of a series of separate points, but the hinge of the sentence is the variant, stronger conjunction ἔτι δέ. Mariß's point 2 expands point 1 (A.'s own use of writing as part of a wider cultural practice); her points 4 and 5 explain and amplify her point 3 (it is paradoxical for an educator to attack writing because in so doing he may seem to be dismissing the value of education itself). For Alcidas, as for Isocrates, φιλοσοφία is very close in sense to (λόγων) παιδεία 'education (in *logoi*)'; see Mariß 2002: 97–9, and on Isocrates, Livingstone 2007: 15–34.
- 35 On the interpretation of this passage, see Mariß 2002: 295–6.
- 36 Greek εἰκῇ 'carelessly', 'without reflection'.
- 37 Cf. Muir 2001: 66: 'Alcidas' conclusion seems to retreat a little from earlier positions . . . With hindsight this can be seen as something of a rear-guard action in the face of developments in literacy and rhetoric which were already becoming unstoppable.'

- 38 Muir 2001: xiii.
- 39 See e.g. Thomas 1992: 123–7; Worthington 1993, 1996.
- 40 See *On Writers* 18–19, 24–6, 14.
- 41 Cf. Eucken 1983: 123 ‘A simple written style such as that of Lysias is left untouched by this polemic’ (‘Eine schlichte Schreibweise wie die des Lysias bleibt von dieser Polemik unberührt’). On precision, ἀκρίβεια, as a quality which makes a speaker suspect in the eyes of his audience, see e.g. Dover 1968: 155; Schloemann 2002: 136–41. It was clearly desirable for a speaker to appear spontaneous. For an attempt to reconstruct the extent to which a practising *rhetor* (Demosthenes) *did* in fact improvise, see Dorjahn 1947, 1950, 1952, 1955, 1957, 1963); uncertainties about the relationship between the speech as delivered and the speech as circulated in writing make such reconstructions hazardous; see Milns 2000: 207–9, and, on the relationship between improvisation and audience response – a relationship whose importance is emphasised by Alcidas – Tacon 2001.
- 42 On Isocrates’ conception of *akribeia*, see Wersdörfer 1940: 95 f.; O’Sullivan 1992: 55–8. For *On Writers* as anti-Isocratean polemic, see e.g. Hudson-Williams 1949b: 28–31; Avezzù 1982: 72; Mariß 2002: 26–55; Graff 2005: 312.
- 43 Cf. esp. 4 *Panegyricus* 11, criticising those who judge highly polished (λίαν ἀπηκριβωμένοι) speeches by standards appropriate to courtroom oratory.
- 44 See 5 *Philip* 81, 12 *Panathenaicus* 9–10, *Letter 1 To Dionysius* 9, *Letter 8 To the Magistrates of Mytilene* 7; Too 1995: 74–112.
- 45 Eucken 1983: 121–40; O’Sullivan 1992: 42–62.
- 46 Eucken 1983: 123: ‘it is clear that, in spite of general observations about the limited value of writing, the attack as a whole is directed against a particular style’ (‘zeigt sich, daß trotz allgemeiner Erklärungen über den geringen Wert des Schreibens überhaupt der Angriff gegen einen bestimmten Stil geführt wird’).
- 47 A view endorsed e.g. by Kennedy 1994: 26.
- 48 O’Sullivan refers (1992: 43 n. 108) to the assessment of Steidle 1952: 287 n. 4: ‘The question of style is nonetheless secondary for him [Alcidas], because all he is concerned with is the fact that a speech which is written (in one style or another) does not stand the test of practical use’ (‘Doch ist die Stilfrage für ihn [Alkidamas] sekundär, weil es ihm nur darauf ankommt, daß die geschriebene Rede (einerlei welchen Stils) sich in der Praxis nicht bewährt’); but as Eucken 1983: 123 points out, it is precisely its emphasis on style that makes Alcidas’ attack ineffective against written texts such as those of the logographers.
- 49 See e.g. Isocrates 15 *Antidosis* 12, 12 *Panathenaicus* 200, and cf. Hudson-Williams 1949b: 65–9; Usener 1994: 47–73.
- 50 Cf. Muir 2001: xiii, Mariß 2002: 303–6.
- 51 See esp. Thucydides 1.138.3 (of Themistocles): φύσεως μὲν δυνάμει, μελέτης δὲ βραχύτητι κράτιστος δὴ οὗτος αὐτοσχεδιάζειν τὰ δέοντα ἐγένετο (‘the power of his natural ability and the brevity of his experience made this man stronger than anyone at improvising what the situation required’). At Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.5.22, improvisation on the part of generals is less positively valued.
- 52 A colourful example is Aeschines 3 *Against Ctesiphon* 158: the law prevents ferrymen from continuing to do this job after they have had an accident ἵνα μηδεὶς αὐτοσχεδιάζῃ εἰς τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων σώματα (‘to stop anyone improvising on the lives of our fellow Greeks’). Cf. Xenophon *Spartan Constitution* 13.5, Isocrates 9 *Evagoras* 41, [Demosthenes] 16 *Eroticus* 43,

Aristotle *Politics* 1326a. More neutrally, Plato *Menexenus* 235cd. At Xenophon *Hellenica* 5.2.32, the sense is extended from ‘not following rules’ to ‘acting without orders’ (which, Agesilaos says, the Spartans allow when it is for the city’s good).

- 53 E.g. Plato *Cratylus* 413d4 (αὐτοσχεδιάζειν in opposition to ἀκηκοὺς λέγειν ‘reporting what one has heard’), *Euthydemus* 5a, of Socrates’ alleged religious innovations, and esp. 16a ὅτι σοφὸς ἦδη παρ’ Εὐθύφρονος τὰ θεῖα γέγονα καὶ ὅτι οὐκέτι ὑπ’ ἀγνοίας αὐτοσχεδιάζω οὐδὲ καινοτομῶ περὶ αὐτὰ (‘that I have become expert in divinity thanks to Euthyphron, and am no longer forced by ignorance to improvise and invent things on this subject’), *Apology* 20d, [Plato] *Sisyphus* 390b.
- 54 The ironies are manifold: Lysias’ credentials as an excellent ποιητής will shortly be subject to devastating criticism; Socrates himself, by contrast, will reveal an extraordinary eloquence, and his first speech and subsequent recantation will display him as anything but an ‘ordinary citizen’. Clearly, however, the sense of αὐτοσχεδιάζων ‘improvising’ here is more than just ‘not reading from a script’: it is ‘making it up as I go along’, in a pejorative sense.
- 55 See Ober 1989: 111 f. Rubinstein 1998 argues that in some contexts ιδιώτης functions almost synonymously with πολιτής ‘citizen’, but recognises the particular tension created by the opposition between ιδιώτης and ῥήτωρ ‘politician’ (1998: 140 f.). On the negative connotations of ιδιώτης, see also Cartledge 2007: 157.
- 56 *On Writers* 21 δυσελπικούρητον. Contrast 10 ἡ τοῦ λέγειν δύναμις τῇ χρεῖα τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπικουρεῖν οἷα τ’ ἐστίν (‘the faculty of writing is able to assist human needs’). The speaker can help; not only is the writer unable to help, he can’t even be helped. Cf. also 28 (‘the written *logos*’ lacks any part in helping others’ (ἀπάσης εὐεργεσίας ἄμοιρος καθέστηκεν: on the text, see n. 17 above).
- 57 Alcidas’ educational programme is surely aimed at an Athenian market, but not exclusively so, and would be equally at home in other cities with a range of political systems. *On Writers* does not use the words δῆμος and δημοκρατία; it is clear, however, that an important part of the improviser’s role as he envisages it is speaking in the assembly (see *On Writers* 9–11), the institution whose composition and powers defined a city’s place on what we might call the ‘democratic continuum’; cf. Robinson 1997: 35–64.
- 58 See Livingstone 2007.
- 59 Hariman 1995: 187.
- 60 Kaufer and Hariman 2008 outlines a corpus-analysis method designed to test, refine and extend Hariman’s model.
- 61 A man approaches the door to the Law and asks the Doorkeeper’s permission to enter. The Doorkeeper refuses permission now, but indicates that it may be granted later. (He also states that this is the first of many doors, each guarded by a Doorkeeper more powerful than the last.) The man dies waiting. As he dies, the Doorkeeper tells him that this entrance was meant for him alone. Conversing with K. after telling the story, the priest emphasises its fixity, but points to a range of interpretations. Was the man deceived? Was the doorkeeper? What was the power relation between them? What freedom did the man have?
- 62 Cf. 15 *Antidosis* 46–7; see also Trédé 1992: 261 f.
- 63 Cf. 9 σιωπῶντες, 15 ἀφωνότερον . . . τῶν ιδιωτῶν, 16 μηδὲν . . . διαφέρειν τῶν ισχυροφώνων, 21 μακροὺς μὲν χρόνους ἐπίσχειν, πολλάκις δὲ τῇ σιωπῇ

διαλαμβάνειν τὸν λόγον, 22 προαπολείπουν τοὺς λόγους.

- 64 10 τῇ χρειᾷ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπικουρεῖν, 11 φιλανθρώπως μεταχειρίζεσθαι τοὺς λόγους (here what the writer cannot do, but by implication what the improviser can), 34 τῇ χρειᾷ τοῦ βίου σύμμετρον τὴν δύναμιν τῶν λόγων κεκτῆσθαι.
- 65 See esp. the striking expression at 16 εὐλύτῳ τῇ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀγχινοῖα χρώμενον ‘deploying a supple close-mindedness of spirit’; cf. further instances of εὐλυτος at 20 and 34, and with ἀγχινοῖα cf. 24 τὴν συντονίαν τῆς διανοίας.
- 66 16 ὑγρῶς (vs. ἰσχυροφώνων); cf. 17 εὐροίας, and Mariß 2002: 211.
- 67 3 εὐπορίᾳ, 17 εὐροίας, 23 ταμιεύεσθαι, 24 and 34 εὐπορον; 3 εὐστόχως ἀκολουθήσαι καὶ τὸν προσήκοντα λόγον εἰπεῖν, 9 χρήσιμον, 10 χρειᾷ . . . ἐπικουρεῖν, 34 τῇ χρειᾷ τοῦ βίου σύμμετρον; 16 φιλανθρώπως, 34 τὴν εὐνοίαν τῶν ἀκροωμένων ἐπικουρον.
- 68 Trédé 1992: 254–60; cf. 260–82 on Isocrates’ more complex conception of *καῖρός* in the written speech. Vallozza 1985: 121 f. sees *On Writers* 22 τῶν καίρων ἀμαρτάνουσι as an exceptional instance where Alcidas uses *καῖρός* in an Isocratean ‘formal’ sense, relating to the proportions of the speech; but the consideration there is not one of pure form, but rather of audience appetite: see Trédé 1992: 258.
- 69 28 ἐκ βιβλίου <μὲν> θεωρούμενος ἔχει τινὰς ἐκπλήξεις. On the sense of ἐκπλήξις here, see Hunter 1986: 416 n. 13; Mariß 2002: 274 f. I am not convinced by Mariß’s claim that the parallelism with *τέρψιν* requires that ἐκπλήξεις too should denote pleasurable emotions (cf. Avezzù’s translation ‘impressionare piacevolmente’); the word designates a reaction which is intense and unreflective. Muir’s ‘produces certain striking effects’ is closer, but too weak; cf. Hunter’s choice of ‘unhinged’ when translating a cognate verb in Thucydides.
- 70 It is striking that the words πόλις ‘city(-state)’ and πολίτης ‘citizen’ occur *only* in section 11, where the herald’s cry in the Assembly is set against the image of the writer-as-tyrant. (This section might even be an elaboration specifically for Athenian consumption of a text otherwise suitable for use or dissemination in other Greek cities, including those with different forms of polity, but this hypothesis is of course untestable.) As has been noted, the words δῆμος and δημοκρατία are absent from the text, though the verb δημηγορεῖν ‘speak among the δῆμος’ occurs in section 9.
- 71 ‘Human life’ (ὁ βίος τῶν ἀνθρώπων) is referred to in 9, 26, 27; ‘humans’ (always in genitive plural ἀνθρώπων) also in 3, 10, 22, ; cf. the adverb φιλανθρώπως (hard to translate: ‘in a way that people like’, Muir) in 16, and the adjective ἀνθρώπινος ‘human’ in 23. Interestingly, the more ideologically loaded ἀνὴρ ‘man [gender marked]’ does not occur.
- 72 Cf. 9 καὶ δημηγοροῦσι καὶ δικαζομένοις καὶ τὰς ἰδίας ὁμιλίας ποιοῦσιν (‘when addressing the people, or in court, or engaging in private conversations’). Similarly the specific functions of speech enumerated in section 10 (criticism, consolation, soothing anger, refuting accusations) belong equally to private, forensic and political eloquence.
- 73 See especially Vlassopoulos 2007.
- 74 In which case, it may have provided a model for the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*: Rosen 2004.
- 75 See e.g. O’Sullivan 1992: 79–105. Much has been written on Alcidas and the

Contest since 1870, when Nietzsche first proposed a connection; see in particular Solmsen 1932, M.L. West 1967, Koniaris 1971, Renehan 1971, Richardson 1981, Avezzù 1982: 84–7, Rosen 2004, Uden 2010.

76 Livingstone 2007, 2009.

77 Ober 1998.

Conclusion

The city as university

The title of this book is deliberately *The City As University*, rather than, say, *The University City*. In later centuries, Athens became a university city in something vaguely like the modern sense of the term: a place to which those with the means and opportunity travelled to spend time, usually but not always in early adulthood, in reading, studying and forming new friendships in order to broaden their minds and enhance their future career prospects. By this time, the attraction of Athens, besides the city's past glory, was the reputation of its more or less institutionalised philosophical schools. Those schools had their roots in the period covered by this book, and were indelibly marked by the influence of its citizens (and non-citizen elective residents such as Aristotle), but learning in the democratic city was essentially non-institutional and only loosely delimited in time and space.¹ Those with the freedom and the time to access social space had access to manifold opportunities for learning: to this extent, learning in Athens was profoundly democratic. By the same token, it was profoundly undemocratic because access to learning was subject to the same restrictions as access to social space, restrictions which (for all the marginal fluidity created by 'free spaces') drastically restricted the opportunities of women and slaves. I use the metaphor of 'the city as university' for democratic Athens for several reasons. One is to underline the fact that learning in the city cannot be marked out as a domain separate from the functioning of the city itself as political, social and cultural sphere. Another is to reflect the city's character as an immersive and saturated place of learning, where citizens were constantly called upon to improvise and use their knowledge and wit to take advantage of situations as they arose (*kairos*), and where every social space presented itself as a potential space for performance, spectatorship and consequent learning (for purposes of the next *kairos* that might arise).

Plato was fascinated by the innumerable trades and specialisms practised in the city of Athens, but intellectually frustrated by their disorderly multiplicity and lack of foundation in any general account of knowledge itself: a deficiency which philosophical dialectic alone could remedy. His great rival in the elite education market of fourth-

century Athens, Isocrates, probably taught his distinctive form of highly polished prose on political subjects mainly by example, furnishing his pupils not with precepts but with model speeches to discuss and emulate. He introduces his own views on teaching in the short essay *Against the Sophists*, and does so mainly by contrasting himself with other teachers. He distances himself in particular from those who pretend that skill in speech (*logoi*), the essence of education as he sees it, can be transmitted as easily as knowledge of the alphabet:² what they do not realise, he says, is that they are presenting a fixed, prescribed technique as a model (*paradeigma*) for an activity which is essentially creative.³

The warning holds good beyond the confines of elite schools such as those of Isocrates, Plato and Aristotle. Learning in democratic Athens was, as I have demonstrated, a creative, interactive, irregular and fluid aspect of human activity, and attempts to capture it as a system or furnish a single paradigm for it are liable to fall foul of Isocrates' criticism. This is not, of course, to say that learning was haphazard or that there was no system, to use Isocrates' example, in the learning of letters. Clearly there was. System was also obviously involved in learning to sow crops, make clothes, dress wounds, throw a javelin, or row in a warship. Athenians also learned many of the same songs and stories; but these elements were not organised into a general educational curriculum. In particular, the many kinds of expertise that could be useful in the performance of democratic citizenship itself were accessed, shared and exercised across complex social and spatial networks. The array of performances of every kind which made up the fabric of social life furnished material for imitation and critique. Moreover, these performances, practical and literary, in the agora, the lawcourts, the assembly, or the theatre, regularly enact and provide models for their own critique, deconstruction, reconstruction and re-use. Lawcourt speeches interpret social conduct as commentary on law, and law as commentary on social conduct. Tragedy concentrates and idealises political rhetoric and exposes it to the test of reduction to an essence and exposure to the extremes of human experiences with the added luxury of time for distanced reflection. Comedy bundles performances of every other genre (and its own) into the cooking-pot and serves them up again in surprising confections, reused and reusable, partly transformed into what they were not and partly revealed as what they always were; every discourse of the city, however rarefied or rebarbative, is boiled down and made digestible.

Each space in the city is a performance space, an opportunity and a challenge to take the stage, taking turn with others and at the right time (*kairos*), and secure status and prestige by displaying the ability

to act as a citizen (*politeuesthai*). The real system of education in Athens is this system of live, variously populated performance spaces which make up the city itself.

Notes

- 1 Though of course, as has been seen, particular things could be learned in particular places, and early adulthood was for practical reasons (livelihood, marriage, military service) likely to be a concentrated time of learning; Theophrastos *Characters* 27 caricatures the 'late learner', ὀψιμαθής, though in fact his eccentricity consists rather in clownish *acting* the part of a much younger man rather than in actually *learning* in a way inappropriate to his age: Diggle 2004: 477.
- 2 Isocrates 13 *Against the Sophists* 10.
- 3 ποιητικοῦ πράγματος τεταγμένην τέχνην παράδειγμα φέροντες λελήθασιν σφᾶς αὐτούς, Isocrates 13 *Against the Sophists* 12.

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